

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

LOCKING UP AND EXPLOITING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN
AT ANGOLA STATE PENITENTIARY:
EXPERIENCES OF INCARCERATION
IN JIM CROW LOUISIANA
(1901-1961)

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL SATISFACTION OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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ENFERMEMENT ET EXPLOITATION DES FEMMES AFRICAINES-AMÉRICAINES AU
PÉNITENCIER D'ANGOLA :
EXPÉRIENCES D'EMPRISONNEMENT DANS LA LOUISIANE DE JIM CROW (1901-
1961)

THÈSE
PRÉSENTÉE
COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE
DU DOCTORAT EN HISTOIRE

PAR
NATHALIE RECH

JUIN 2023

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL
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DEDICATION

To Albert Woodfox,
in memoriam

To all victims and survivors of Louisiana prisons,
in solidarity

NOTES ON LANGUAGE

Throughout this dissertation, there are quotations from individuals who used offensive racial labels. I chose not to sanitize these historical statements but to present the authentic language of the period, whenever documented direct statements are available. I regret any offense or hurt caused by these crude idioms.

I tried to stay away as much as possible from dehumanizing language referring to incarcerated people. Therefore, I acknowledge that my use of ‘prisoner’, chosen for practical reasons, might be problematic. I understand this term as referring to a temporary situation, rather than a characteristic of an individual.

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ABSTRACT

My doctoral dissertation, *Locking up and Exploiting African American Women at Angola State Penitentiary: Experiences of Incarceration in Jim Crow Louisiana (1901-1961)*, explores the questions of whether gender combined with race led to specific incarceration conditions for African American women in the Louisiana penal farm during Jim Crow. During this period marked by racial segregation and terror, Angola was a mixed-gender prison in which Black women were less than five percent of the prisoner population. African Americans' overrepresentation in prison was more pronounced among women than it was among men. I built a database of over 1,000 women recorded in penitentiary admission records. I then collected criminal files from a dozen of the 64 Louisiana criminal courts as well as press materials related to the incarcerated women in my database. This combination of quantitative and qualitative sources and associated methodologies allowed me to assemble a detailed statistical portrait and to reveal dozens of their individual stories, which humanize the subjects of research. Throughout my dissertation, I uncover the racial and gendered hierarchies at play in the penitentiary-plantation by making comparisons between Black women and other categories of prisoners also held at Angola. While doing so, I also trace the continuities and reveal the discontinuities between the carceral regime Black women underwent at Angola and their lives in the "outside", and with other regimes of oppression and domination, in particular slavery.

The experiences of incarceration of Angola's captive Black women are analyzed along the themes of space, time and the Black female body. Angola, a former slave plantation converted into "the bloodiest prison in America", presented an "ideal" geography for confinement. Black women were housed in racially segregated female quarters. Held captive in a predominantly male custodial institution, they were always considered a disturbance. The spatiality of the prison also mirrored the broader spatial politics of segregation in Jim Crow Louisiana. Nevertheless, Black women found ways to challenge the imperative of immobility placed on them. Captivity and coercion as well as a strictly imposed schedule made it challenging for the incarcerated to structure their time and create their own routines. However, Black women's attempts to reclaim control over their time can be detected in some of the prisoners' activities and in their acts of resistance. The Black female body, already marked by the hardship of Black life during Jim Crow, became an object of scrutiny in the penal system. It was then transformed by the carceral institution into a productive tool through coerced labor and through corporal punishment reminiscent of slavery. Sexual violence and medical neglect also served to dominate the Black female body.

My work sheds light, not just on the politics of confinement in Louisiana during Jim Crow, but also on contemporary concerns about mass incarceration in Louisiana (world's incarceration capital), the U.S., and elsewhere. By mapping the sociodemographics of the Black female carceral population, this dissertation reveals that these individuals received an average education, occupied domestic work like the majority of working-class Black women of their time, managed their own homes, and faced the everyday occurrences of racial discrimination and segregation. Dominant white society presumed Black women to be lazy, disorderly, and promiscuous and

therefore, they were deemed undeserving of respect and protection. This group of incarcerated women shared the experiences and aspirations of most African American women from the working-class, until their incarceration placed them apart (both physically and symbolically).

My dissertation fills a gap in the historiography of incarceration. To date, comparatively little work has been produced on the female population at Angola, on the history of this infamous penitentiary, and more generally on the Louisiana criminal justice system. My research contributes to the growing field of historical studies interested in Black female imprisonment. This project also demonstrates how Black women's incarceration at Angola replicated their ever-present victimization (physical, sexual, economic) in Jim Crow Louisiana, and mirrored some, but not all, of the abuses of the slavery institution.

Key words: AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY, INCARCERATION, BLACK WOMEN, FORCED LABOR, STATE-SANCTIONED VIOLENCE, RESISTANCE

RÉSUMÉ

Ma thèse de doctorat, *Enfermement et exploitation des femmes Africaines-Américaines au pénitencier d'Angola : Expériences d'emprisonnement dans la Louisiane de Jim Crow (1901-1961)*, examine comment l'intersection du genre et de la race a conduit à des conditions particulières d'incarcération pour les femmes Africaines-Américaines à la ferme pénale Louisianaise pendant la période de ségrégation raciale. Au cours de cette période marquée par la terreur pour les Noirs, Angola est une prison mixte dans laquelle les femmes représentent moins de cinq pourcent de la population carcérale. La sur-représentation des Africains-Américains y est plus accentuée chez les femmes que chez les hommes. J'ai construit une base de données de plus d'un millier de femmes à partir des registres d'écrou. J'ai également collecté les dossiers criminels dans une douzaine de cours, ainsi que des coupures de presse relatives à ces femmes. Tout au long de la thèse, je démontre les hiérarchies raciales et de genre en réalisant des comparaisons entre les femmes Noires et les autres catégories de prisonniers. Ce faisant, je dessine les continuités et relève les discontinuités entre le régime carcéral et les vies de ces femmes « en dehors », ainsi que les parallèles avec d'autres régimes d'oppression et de domination, notamment l'esclavage.

Les expériences d'incarcération des femmes Noires captives à Angola sont déclinées selon les thèmes de l'espace, du temps, et du corps. Angola, une ancienne plantation d'esclaves transformée en « prison la plus sanglante en Amérique », présente une géographie « idéale » pour l'enfermement. Les femmes Noires y sont enfermées dans des quartiers féminins ségrégués selon la race. Captives dans une prison majoritairement masculine, leur présence est dérangement. La spatialité de la prison renvoie aussi à ce qui se passe « au dehors » dans une Louisiane ségréguée. Néanmoins, les femmes Noires incarcérées résistaient à l'immobilité imposée par la prison, par l'évasion ou d'autres moyens. La captivité et un horaire rigide faisaient en sorte qu'elles ne pouvaient pas structurer leur propre temps. Malgré ce, leurs actes de résistance démontrent de leur volonté de déterminer les conditions de leur enfermement. Le corps de la femme Noire, déjà marqué par les vicissitudes de la vie sous Jim Crow, devient un objet scruté dans le système pénal. Transformé par la prison en outil via le travail forcé et les punitions corporelles, ce corps est aussi objet de domination par le biais des violences sexuelles et de la négligence médicale.

Mon travail met en lumière la question de l'emprisonnement en Louisiane pendant la période de ségrégation raciale, ainsi que les enjeux actuels d'incarcération de masse en Louisiane (la capitale mondiale de l'incarcération), aux États-Unis et ailleurs. Au moyen d'un portrait statistique, il révèle également que les femmes Noires détenues recevaient une éducation semblable aux autres femmes Africaines Américaines. Comme elles, elles travaillaient majoritairement comme domestiques, et faisaient face à la discrimination raciale. La société dominante blanche les voyait comme paresseuses, déviantes, débauchées, et par conséquent ne leur accordait ni respect, ni protection. Jusqu'à ce que leur criminalisation les place à part (physiquement et symboliquement), leurs réalités et leurs aspirations ressemblaient à celles des femmes de la classe ouvrière Noire.

Ma thèse permet de combler un vide dans l'historiographie des prisons. À date, peu de travaux ont été réalisés sur l'emprisonnement des femmes à Angola, sur l'histoire de ce pénitencier tristement célèbre, et plus généralement sur le système pénal en Louisiane. Ma recherche contribue au champ de la recherche historique sur les femmes Noires incarcérées, un champ en plein développement. Ce projet démontre aussi que l'incarcération de ces femmes à Angola reproduisait leur victimisation (physique, sexuelle, économique) sous Jim Crow, et comportait certaines des mêmes caractéristiques des abus de l'esclavage.

Mots-clés : HISTOIRE AFRICAINE-AMÉRICAINNE, PRISONS, FEMMES NOIRES, TRAVAIL FORCÉ, VIOLENCE D'ÉTAT, RÉSISTANCE.

INTRODUCTION

The date was Saturday, December 11, 1909. The location: Angola, the penitentiary-plantation operated by the state of Louisiana, tucked in an elbow of the Mississippi river at the border between Louisiana and the state of Mississippi. Around sixty Black women were state prisoners at the time, housed in the Black section of the female quarters at Angola, called Camp D. An additional eight white women were confined at Camp D, nicknamed the “Forbidden City”. Placed in the middle of the 18,000-acre penitentiary-plantation, it was at a distance from other camps, where hundreds of Black and white men were held captive. It was said that male prisoners had been killed “for sneaking out of their camp and trying to get in there” at Camp D, where they hoped to meet with women¹.

The historical record reveals that on that day, Captain D.P. Gayle, the penitentiary employee in charge of Camp D, punished fifteen Black women, i.e. a quarter of the Black captives of the female camp. Considered guilty of “dangerous threats and disobedience to [the] Captain”, each of them received between twenty and twenty-five lashes².

This brief mention is one of the only instances in penitentiary archives where incarcerated Black women manifested themselves as a “choir” and united against their captors³. Pronouncing

¹ “Torture Factory”, by Jon Edgar Webb, 1941, Vertical Files, Hogan Archive of New Orleans Music and New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University Special Collections, New Orleans.

² Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, Collection P1980-353, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. Hereafter cited as LSP Collection. Most of these volumes are accessible online through the Family Search platform. The Family Search organization in Salt Lake City, Utah, hosts the “Louisiana State Penitentiary Records, 1866-1963, Correctional Institution Records Angola”. <https://FamilySearch.org>. Accessed September 26, 2020.

³ Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, 348–49.

“dangerous threats” against one of the Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP) officials, but distant for over a century, their voices cannot quite be heard by us. However, we can imagine their rage at being put in a cage, and coerced to labor for the state on a former slave plantation. Suddenly, they appear to us, not only as individuals caught in the history of a powerful institution, but also as members of an organized group, albeit momentarily, subjects capable of forming a collective movement⁴. United to conduct a subversive action, to disobey the penitentiary rules, and to intentionally disrupt its order, these fifteen Black female prisoners demonstrated their will to affront institutional power at great risk of retaliation. Through their simultaneous appearance in the archival record, they showed us that they were capable of solidarity. They also demonstrated that they intended to shape, even for a short time, their own experiences of incarceration. At least for a brief moment, a collective uprising seemed possible, and these women hoped they could emancipate themselves from the captain’s power. They refused to admit that their failure was as inevitable as was his victory over them. Or maybe, fully aware of the unbalanced power relations, they decided to defy him anyway, no matter how violent the repression would be⁵.

This event, which remains mostly obscure, also encapsulates the challenges of this historical research to uncover Black women’s experiences in institutional sources and to recover their stories. Written by hostile captors, these sources are also extremely short on details. They offer no possibility to access directly Black women’s voices. LSP official sources, which constitute the main primary sources of this doctoral research, often leave us without clear or firm answers. This brief mention of a collective uprising in the historical records prompts many questions. Only our “informed imagination” can help us discern some of the answers. How many women did in fact revolt on that day against Captain Gayle and the institutional authority he represented? Were they only fifteen or else, the camp captain targeted only those deemed the “ring leaders” but many more from Camp D had participated? What was the reason of this uprising? What happened that day of December 1909? How did it start? How did it end? How did this event affect the experiences of the fifteen women who were whipped in the following period? How did it impact

⁴ Blue, *Doing Time in the Depression: Everyday Life in Texas and California Prisons*; Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows: Convict Culture in the First Era of Mass Imprisonment, 1919-1940.”

⁵ Scott, *La Domination et les arts de la résistance: Fragments du discours subalterne*, 94–96; Sykes, *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison*, 81, 99.

the lives of the other captives of Camp D⁶? Could this event have caused a chain reaction in the male camps?

Whatever the answers to these questions, the incident mentioned in the historical record reveals one fact unambiguously: the institution relied on physical violence to enforce prison discipline. Prisoners' compliance with the rules relied on the power imbalance within the institution. The incident also confirms that Black women were denied womanhood as it was defined in the South in the first decades of the 20th century. Indeed, rather than being perceived as fragile human beings deserving of protection, or even as "fallen women" in need of rehabilitation, Black women were treated with as much cruelty as male prisoners. Black women's assertiveness in their relationships with white men was of course not to be tolerated in Jim Crow Louisiana. This was the case here, even when these women were conceivably not in a position to threaten a powerful institution like LSP. This contributes to explain why their action of collective resistance on that Saturday of December 1909 was met with such violent repression.

The protagonists' age ranged from 23 to 58 years. The youngest was Annie B., 23 years old, who had arrived at 18. The "veteran" of the group was Jane B., who was admitted in 1902 at 49 years old. At the time of the event, she was 58, and the oldest woman at Camp D. Hattie H. who had arrived thirteen months prior was the latest admitted within the group. Hence, they were all aware of the carceral regime and of the brutal treatment they could expect. Somehow, it did not matter, because it did not stop them from protesting. Fourteen women out of fifteen had been convicted of crimes against persons, including four who were serving life sentences for murder. They were convicted in ten different parishes across the state of Louisiana. By 1916, they would all be out of Angola and free, except for Amelia T., who would die in 1910 at Angola, allegedly "killed by a falling tree"⁷. Before their incarceration, they all worked for wages outside of their household, most of them doing menial work. Nine of these fifteen women were illiterate. They shared the

⁶ Gresham Sykes argues that "insurrections do not end with the return of official control, but become a part of the structure, like a flaw left in a piece of steel which has been subjected to excessive strain". Sykes, *The Society of Captives*, 110.

⁷ Entries #987, #3219, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entries #3926, #4628, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection. **Since I could not obtain consent from my subjects to reveal their stories, and to prevent perpetrating again the violence they were subjected to at Angola during their incarceration, I choose to tell their stories without revealing their full names out of respect for their traumatic experiences and concern for consent and privacy.**

same barriers to education and the same economic exploitation as most African American women from the working-class. Their story, as many others in this dissertation, is frustratingly incomplete. Nevertheless, their dissent erupts in the archives, and requires our attention.

Research subject

My doctoral research investigates the experiences of African American women incarcerated at Angola during the first six decades of its operation as a state penitentiary (1901-1961). My research has two main focuses: the practices of confinement and exploitation imposed on these women within the penitentiary, and the stories of these women inside and outside Angola. It answers a series of questions, including: What were the gendered mechanisms of white supremacy in the carceral system? How gender combined with race led to different incarceration conditions, for instance in terms of forced labor assignments? How did these factors impact the discipline they were subjected to in captivity? Were women incarcerated alongside men and guarded by men especially vulnerable to physical or sexual abuse?

My starting hypothesis is that, given their gender and race, incarcerated Black women had specific experiences at Angola, differentiating them both from Black men and from white women. I investigate how gender and race, individually and combined, led to distinct penitentiary policies and practices, for instance in terms of forced labor assignments or in terms of release mechanisms. I also examine how these categories made Black women particularly vulnerable to physical violence and to sexual abuse. Despite the fact that during Jim Crow, Angola was a mixed-gender prison in which Black women were less than five percent of the prisoner population, examining their experiences bring knowledge on some aspects of the development of Louisiana carceral state that remain hidden in studies focusing on the male population⁸.

⁸ Source: Angola Women's Database.

Simultaneously, I argue that arrest, conviction, and incarceration separate (physically and symbolically) these women from the general population of Black women, but do not erase their larger shared experience⁹. By mapping the sociodemographics of the Black female carceral population, this dissertation reveals that these individuals received an average education, performed domestic work like the majority of working-class Black women of their time, managed their own homes, and faced everyday occurrences of racial discrimination and segregation. By looking at several of their individual stories, this dissertation humanizes the subjects of research. This group of incarcerated women shared the experiences and aspirations of most African American women from the working-class, until their incarceration placed them apart. The focus of this research is on the accused as women rather than as alleged criminals. They are presented when possible with details on their life circumstances before their incarceration. In my research, I envision Angola as a window on Black female life during Jim Crow. Looking at Angola's captive population's circumstances can provide information on the oppression imposed on African Americans more generally and of the working-class in particular. It allows making links between the different forms of white supremacist violence Black women faced in Louisiana.

The time frame of my research starts in 1901 when the state of Louisiana bought the Angola plantation in order to develop a penal farm where most of the state prisoners would be sent to live and toil. My study ends in 1961 with the transfer of all female state prisoners to another penal farm in St. Gabriel in the Iberville parish, which would later become the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW).

In the “outside” world, this 60-year period (1901-1961) was marked by two world wars, a major economic crisis, as well as tremendous agricultural innovations, and at a more regional scale, the rise of legal segregation accompanied by extreme racial violence, as well as the Great Migration and the Civil Rights movement. For Angola prisoners, the life “inside” was of course impacted by these major events, for instance in the number of their convictions. Their lives were also

⁹ Gross, “Exploring Crime and Violence in Early-Twentieth-Century Black Women’s History” in: Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry, *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, 57.

shaped by state politics and changes in penitentiary management that often stemmed from them¹⁰. My dissertation examines how the broader historical context influenced the institution and the individuals it confined. It shows continuities and discontinuities over the period 1901-1961 and beyond. It documents the changes occurring throughout the period 1901-1961, in relation to prison policies and practices affecting incarcerated Black women's experiences of incarceration. It also reveals the ways in which individual Black women shaped or attempted to shape their own experiences of incarceration, and how this resistance changed over time.

The spatial framework is the penal farm of Angola, although the research sometimes looks beyond its geographical limits to reveal the other spaces where Black women were confined (for instance, the old state penitentiary in Baton Rouge). Because Black women were working in different locations including in the fields beside male prisoners, and in prison employees' homes, this dissertation looks beyond Angola's female quarters (Camp D, and later "the Willows") to encompass the whole site of the penitentiary-plantation.

Today, Angola is the largest maximum-security prison in the U.S. Its captives are all males, and the majority of them are Black. It currently holds more prisoners than any other correctional facility in the country. Its size (seventy-two square kilometres) is roughly of Manhattan¹¹. After having the reputation of "the bloodiest prison in America" for several decades, Angola has more recently claimed the title of "model prison"¹². My dissertation proposes to examine the grounds for these assertions by bringing the discussion as close as possible to the incarcerated persons themselves.

Current statistics contribute to make Louisiana a pertinent and special object of study, in addition to the fact that Angola's past has scarcely been documented, especially when it comes to its Black female captives. Since 1986, Louisiana has ranked in the top ten states nationwide for the

¹⁰ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment: The History of the Louisiana State Penal System*.

¹¹ Gardullo, "Angola Prison: Collecting and Interpreting the Afterlives of Slavery in a National Museum", 24, 26.

¹² "Blood Took Pen 'Out of Red', Records Show", *The Times Picayune*, May 11, 1941; LSP, Warden Office, "Angola Story", 1999, Vertical Files "Angola", Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

highest incarceration rate. Currently, Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the U.S.¹³, which is almost double the national average: 1,094 per 100,000 people compared to 664 per 100,000¹⁴. One in twelve children in Louisiana have an incarcerated parent, which speaks to the social ripples of mass incarceration in communities¹⁵. While only 12.4 percent of Louisiana population declared their race and ethnicity as “Black alone” at the last census, 66 percent of Louisiana prisoners are Black (68.2 percent of the male population, and 40.0 percent of the female prison population)¹⁶. This over-representation confirms that: “Race helps to explain why the United States is exceptional among the democratic industrial societies in the severity and extent of the punitive policy and in the paucity of its social-welfare institutions”¹⁷.

Women represent 5.6 percent of the Louisiana adult correctional population, a proportion similar to the period covered in this dissertation. In 2018, almost two thirds (60.1 percent) of the 1,827 incarcerated women were imprisoned for non-violent first offenses, with almost 64 percent of them sentenced to prison for 10 years or less¹⁸. Louisiana women face multiple challenges while incarcerated, including abuse, pregnancy, maintaining family bonds, mental health issues, to name only a few. Women in jails are overwhelmingly survivors of reported abuse. Nationally, 86 percent of incarcerated women have experienced sexual violence, 77 percent have experienced partner violence, and 60 percent have experienced caregiver violence¹⁹. A significant proportion of those incarcerated for violent crimes are serving sentences, including life sentences, for standing up to their abusers²⁰. In 2018, the Louisiana legislature passed the Dignity for

¹³ Source: ACLU Louisiana, Mass Incarceration. <https://www.laaclu.org/en/issues/mass-incarceration> Accessed August 29, 2022.

¹⁴ Source: Prison Policy Initiative, States of Incarceration. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/LA.html> Accessed August 29, 2022.

¹⁵ Rachel Leah, “Remembering and Celebrated Incarcerated Mothers on Mother’s Day”, Salon, May 13, 2018. Quoted in Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane, Per(Sister) exhibition catalog.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Louisiana 2020 Census. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/louisiana-population-change-between-census-decade.html> Accessed August 29, 2022; Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Corrections Services, Fact Sheet, June 30, 2018. <https://www.doc.la.gov/media/1/Briefing%20Book/July%2018/2.demographics.pdf> Accessed April 16, 2019.

¹⁷ Glenn Loury in: Loury et al., *Race, Incarceration, and American Values*, 11.

¹⁸ Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Corrections Services, Fact Sheet, June 30, 2018. <https://www.doc.la.gov/media/1/Briefing%20Book/July%2018/2.demographics.pdf> Accessed April 16, 2019.

¹⁹ Vera Institute of Justice, *Overlooked: Women and Jails in an Era of Reform*, 2016.

²⁰ Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane, Per(Sister) exhibition catalog.

Incarcerated Women Act, which promised to ensure access to women's healthcare products and to uphold women's privacy from male correctional officers²¹. However, women have generally remained an afterthought in carceral systems designed for a majority of incarcerated men, as was the case a century ago.

Tracing the lived experiences of Black women who were captives of the state of Louisiana during Jim Crow sheds light not just on the politics of confinement in Louisiana. It also contributes to a better understanding of contemporary concerns in the U.S. and elsewhere for mass incarceration and state violence against Black women and other marginalized groups. It helps discern the historical roots of mass incarceration in the entangled logics of white supremacy and capitalism. It also gives keys to understanding the racism and sexism at play in most custodial institutions around the planet²².

With this dissertation, my main research objective was to document the experiences of incarceration of Angola's captive Black women. These experiences are analyzed along the themes of space, time and the Black female body. Throughout my dissertation, I uncover the racial and gendered hierarchies at play in the penitentiary-plantation by making comparisons between the subjects of my study and other categories of prisoners also held at Angola. While doing so, I also trace the continuities and reveal the discontinuities between the carceral regime Black women underwent at Angola and their lives in the "outside". I also examine historical continuities and discontinuities with other regimes of oppression and domination, in particular slavery.

Institutional sources were almost the only historical records available to document the lived experiences of those held captive by the institution. Therefore, I had to be constantly "on the lookout for whatever the records might disclose" about Black female prisoners, and to examine these sources critically²³. My starting point was that prisons are "deliberate and calibrated

²¹ "Dignity Act Louisiana", #cut50. https://www.cut50.org/dignity_louisiana Accessed April 17, 2019.

²² Gwenola Ricordeau, Postface: Armer l'imagination abolitionniste, in: Wang, *Capitalisme carcéral*, 321–22.

²³ Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience. Disciplinary Institutions and Their Inmates in Early Modern Europe*, 171.

mechanisms of punishment inflicting state-legitimated pain”²⁴. My research allowed me to get a sense of the level of oppression, brutality and exploitation that the state of Louisiana inflicted Black women during their incarceration at Angola. It convinced me that no reform could alleviate the inherently oppressive nature of prisons, nor change their profoundly racist and sexist modes of operation.

Contributions of the research

My contributions with this dissertation are plural. First, it contributes new knowledge about Louisiana’s main carceral institution, the infamous Angola penal farm. Focusing on incarcerated Black women, it uncovers aspects of the carceral regime that had stayed obscure in previous studies. For instance, this research documents the racial and gendered hierarchies dominating prison life at Angola. It shows that race and gender created categories of prisoners who received differential treatment and who behaved differently from prisoners belonging to other categories. By doing so, this research contributes to the growing field of historical studies interested in Black female imprisonment. In addition, mining the official records to dig up individual stories, this dissertation gets the reader closer to the human experiences historical subjects lived while in the custody of the Louisiana state.

Second, this project sheds new light on Black female life during Jim Crow. It points out how white dominant society presumed Black women to be lazy, disorderly, and promiscuous and therefore, how they were deemed undeserving of respect and protection²⁵. This project is particularly interested in marginalized women, i.e. women who are not typically written about and received little attention in the field of Black women’s history. In my efforts to understand the

²⁴ Carlen, “Why Study Women’s Imprisonment? Or Anyone Else’s? An Indefinite Article”, 136.

²⁵ Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935*, 10; Gross, “African American Women, Mass Incarceration and the Politics of Protection”, 30.

experiences of Black women during their incarceration at Angola, I tried to answer the question historian Mary Bosworth raised: “How did the treatment of the incarcerated compare to the everyday lives of other similar individuals?” This meant to examine the prison not in a vacuum, but as “an institution that is both within and excluded from society”²⁶. This dissertation builds up on previous historical studies demonstrating that the penal system existed in large parts to serve the interests of white supremacy²⁷. Black women’s violent encounters with police forces, and criminal courts, resulting in their incarceration at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, were indeed extensions of their ever-present victimization (physical, sexual, economic) by white dominant society. Considering the geographical remoteness of Angola and the secluded nature of carceral institutions, it would be easy to forget that, in this space, behaviors and attitudes that were prevalent in the “free world” were replicated. However, they were, which is why I argue along other historians of Black women’s incarceration that: “Prison duplicated their subordination to whites and to men”²⁸.

African American women who found themselves state prisoners during the period examined in this dissertation were born only a few decades after Emancipation. They grew up during the so-called Progressive Era, which in reality was the Nadir for African Americans and in the first decades of the 20th century, which saw the hardening of racial segregation and racial terror²⁹. One of the ways in which the racial project of Jim Crow unfolded in Louisiana, in the South and in the rest of the U.S., was a tremendous level of violence towards African Americans. Across the South, African American men and women were lynched by mobs formed by angry whites seeking retribution for real and usually imagined crimes. Mob violence served to exercise social control over African Americans, particularly those who were assertive in their relationships with whites, or had labor conflicts with them³⁰. This “public performance of domination” served to

²⁶ Bosworth, “The Past as a Foreign Country?”, 437.

²⁷ Thompson, “From Researching the Past to Reimagining the Future, Locating Carceral Crisis and the Key to Its End, in the Long Twentieth Century.”

²⁸ Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World, Alabama, 1865-1900*, 120.

²⁹ Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901*.

³⁰ Michael Pfeifer showed regional distinctions in the patterns of lynchings perpetrated in Louisiana. He demonstrated the prevalence of lynching in Louisiana’s northwestern Red River Valley, a region where cotton cultivation dominated economic life and where elite planters held the power. Pfeifer, “Lynching and Criminal Justice in Regional Context: Iowa, Wyoming, and Louisiana, 1878-1946”, 199–313.

uphold white supremacy³¹. Even after the number of lynchings decreased, “crude indignities and bestial acts of random violence toward Blacks increased”, resulting in terror with deep psychological, political, social and economic impacts for the entire community³².

Because of their concentration in domestic service, Black women were often working in white homes. Their closeness to the white world made them particularly vulnerable to various forms of sexualized racist violence, and easy targets for criminalization³³. In this dissertation, I develop the argument that incarceration was an integral part of the racial project conducted by the dominant white society who acted to gain collective privileges. Targets of state violence, these women were part of the racial and gender project of white supremacy in Louisiana. This research also demonstrates that, in an attempt to shape their own world, they fought back state power in their own ways. Despite their marginal numbers in prisons and penitentiaries and their invisibility in official discourses, Black women were an integral part of the system of exploitation imposed on the incarcerated. At Angola, through their coerced labor and otherwise, they were key cogs in the functioning of the penitentiary-plantation.

By examining coerced labor as one of the main features of the carceral regime enforced at Angola, this dissertation also contributes to labor history. It shows for instance that prison labor was one factor determining the severity of the sentence. The nature of the work prisoners were assigned to was determined along racial and gendered hierarchies. Unwilling workers were subjected to punishment designed to extract their labor force and productivity. The organization of labor in prison also had an impact on the medical attention prisoners were able to receive during their incarceration.

³¹ Prince, *The Ballad of Robert Charles: Searching for the New Orleans Riot of 1900*, 70.

³² Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy and Society*, 118–19; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 13.

³³ Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*, 132–34; Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910*, 34.

Chapter overview

Part 1 explores African American women's silences and penitentiary authorities' denials, and is composed of three chapters. Chapter 1 presents the historiographies this dissertation builds on. The last ten years or so have witnessed historians' growing interest for African American women's criminalization and incarceration. Their works provide the basis for my understanding of the subject. In addition, several scholars have documented the past of the Louisiana State Penitentiary and other carceral institutions in the Pelican state, which proved useful in many ways to this dissertation. Chapter 2 discusses sources, data and methodology. Presenting in detail the primary sources, chapter 2 articulates the challenge of silences and the concepts used in this dissertation to tackle this challenge. Penitentiary admission records form the basis of the historical records used in this dissertation. Chapter 2 presents the building of Angola Women's Database, the main tool I used throughout the dissertation to get information on Black female prisoners, both as individuals and as a group. This database contains information on 963 Black women and 93 white women. I present in detail my methodology combining individual and institutional investigation, and quantitative and qualitative analysis. Chapter 3 provides a brief presentation of the state penitentiary regime in Louisiana before the creation of the penal farm at Angola. It also puts into context the history of Black women's incarceration in Louisiana (and more generally in the U.S.) before the twentieth century.

Parts 2, 3 and 4 examine African American women's experiences of incarceration at Angola. I organized the scattered information extracted from the archives along three dimensions: space, time, and the Black female body. Scholars who research through direct interviews the experiences of individuals who are currently incarcerated demonstrate that these dimensions are intertwined. Indeed, the corporeality of an individual is engaged in their sense of passage of time as well as in their relationship to the space. This is particularly true in the constrained space of the prison where individuals are held captive for the length of a judicial sentence³⁴. I resort to fragment carceral experiences along these three dimensions by first setting the scene, then

³⁴ Moran, *Carceral Geography: Spaces and Practices of Incarceration*, 49.

discussing how Black female prisoners “did time”, and finally examining how bodies were affected by the carceral regime but also engaged in resistance against this regime.

More precisely, in Chapter 4, I answer geographer Ruth Gilmore’s call to investigate “the territoriality of power [which] is key to understanding racism”³⁵. I present the history of Angola before the 20th century to demonstrate that this territory has a troubled past, which in turn influenced the incarcerated women’s present. An Indigenous village before settler colonialism, Angola became a cotton plantation in the 19th century. This was made possible through Indigenous dispossession and through the coerced labor of hundreds of enslaved African Americans brought there by Angola’s first owner, Isaac Franklin (who incidentally made fortune with the domestic traffic of slaves). The plantation later became the property of former Confederate Major Samuel James Sr., who happened to be the lessee for all LSP prisoners after the Civil War. It was James who brought the first Black women prisoners to work on his Angola property. Chapter 4 demonstrates that Angola penitentiary has affiliations with a different type of custodial spaces: the slave plantation. Chapter 4 then turns to presenting the geography of Angola as its captives knew it in the 20th century. It retraces the moments when Black female prisoners who were “pushed off the edge of the world” arrived at the penitentiary and how carceral space presented itself to them³⁶. For instance, Chapter 4 describes and analyses the admission procedures during which the admission records (which form the main primary sources for this research) were written.

Chapter 5 examines the women’s quarters at Angola. Placed in the center of the prison grounds, the “Forbidden City” was a “tantalizing structure at once inviting and forbidding” for the male prisoners who were held in the other camps scattered on the penitentiary-plantation³⁷. The women’s lives were shaped by the fact that they were housed in a predominantly male custodial institution where they were always considered a disturbance. Black women’s spatial experiences were also marked by the racial segregation of the women’s quarters, and its unequal conditions

³⁵ Gilmore, “Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography”, 22.

³⁶ The expression is from one of the female prisoners’ interviews at Frontera, California. Quoted in: Kassebaum and Ward, *Women’s Prison: Sex and Social Structure*, 4.

³⁷ “Torture Factory”, by Jon Edgar Webb, 1941, Vertical Files, Hogan Archive of New Orleans Music and New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University Special Collections, New Orleans.

between Black and white women. Chapter 5 demonstrates that the spatiality of the prison echoed the broader spatial politics of segregation in Jim Crow Louisiana. It also argues that Black women found ways to challenge the imperative of immobility placed on them - through escape attempts and otherwise.

Part 3 examines Black female prisoners' experiences of time through the lens of power relations existing on the penitentiary-plantation and beyond. Chapter 6 examines the sentences they received in court when convicted and the sentences they served at LSP. It compares the different release mechanisms (Good Time, parole, commutation, to name only a few) and proposes interpretations for how these were applied to Black women. It establishes who exercised external control over the time Black women had to serve in custody and under state surveillance. It also discusses what leeway Black women had to influence this external control in order to reduce their long anguish of waiting in captivity³⁸.

Chapter 7 explores the rigid time organization of their captivity and establishes the centrality of coerced labor in their experiences of time spent at Angola. Despite the importance of the issue of forced labor to understand Black women's experiences of incarceration at Angola, I choose to discuss this late in the dissertation, once the stage was set and the timeframe was put in context. Together, chapters 6 and 7 argue that captivity and coercion as well as a strictly imposed schedule made it challenging for the incarcerated to structure their time and create their own routines. They also argue that Black women's attempts to reclaim control over their time can be detected in some of the prisoners' activities and in their acts of resistance.

Finally, Part 4 examines bodily experiences. It is constituted of one chapter. Chapter 8 argues that before incarceration, the Black female body was already marked by the hardship of Black life during Jim Crow. An object of scrutiny in the penal system, it was then transformed by the carceral institution into a productive tool through coerced labor. Black women's bodies were subjected to corporal punishment and in the later period to solitary confinement to discipline them. They were also targets of sexual violence, which served as another tool of domination. Unprotected by prison physicians who actively supported the prison regime of coerced labor and

³⁸ Wang, *Capitalisme carcéral*, 206–15.

cruel punishments, the Black female body was neglected when it came to healthcare, and occasionally used for medical experimentation. Nevertheless, it was sometimes with their own bodies that Black women resisted the carceral regime.

PART I

SILENCES AND DENIALS

History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots³⁹.

(Michel-Rolph Trouillot)

Ever since prisons came to occupy a central role in the punishment of alleged criminals, there have been debates about their function and their outcomes. Despite ample evidence of their past and present failure to get rid of crime, in Western societies and beyond, as well as to “reform” or “rehabilitate” marginalized individuals to transform them into “respectable” citizens, prison and penitentiary authorities still claim that they do just that. Louisiana is no exception. As archives attest, this type of denial has been present throughout the history of the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Also constant has been the denial of the brutality employed against prisoners behind the levees that obscure the view of the penitentiary-plantation and its captives. This research offers to highlight the enduring denials presented by the penitentiary authorities to mask the realities of incarceration.

This dissertation also seeks to address silences about prisoners’ experiences in captivity in the historiography of U.S. prisons, especially when it comes to African American women. This research is particularly attentive to bringing to the foreground the resistance strategies these captives employed against their jailers and against institutional control. Building on works

³⁹ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, xix.

produced by a growing number of historians interested in the lived experiences of Black women prisoners, this dissertation promotes an intersectional understanding of incarceration and contributes to the study of gender, race, and the carceral state.

Chapter One examines this burgeoning historiography and helps situate the contribution of this research to the field. It also presents briefly historical and other scholarly work on the Louisiana carceral state.

Chapter Two presents the sources gathered and the data available for this research as well as the methodology employed. It serves to articulate the question of silences in the context of archival research conducted on Black women's lived experiences at Angola. As Chapter Two makes it clear, certain archives that were preserved serve a narrative of progress and modernization, while other archives challenging that narrative disappeared.

Chapter Three provides a brief presentation of the state penitentiary regime in Louisiana before the creation of the penal farm at Angola. This helps provide contextual information on the 19th century origins of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, including the financial imperatives imposed on the institution by the State, and the historical events and processes that affected the institution from its inception up to the dawn of the 20th century.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORIOGRAPHIES

Since the publication in 1972 of Gerda Lerner's groundbreaking *Black Women in White America*, a growing number of scholars have taken on the challenge of the invisibility of Black women in historical accounts⁴⁰. This has served several purposes. First, it revealed the complex identities of "being simultaneously black and female, black and American, and American and female"⁴¹. Second, it allowed for a better assessment of the many roles African American women have played in U.S. history, not only as mere victims of racial oppression, but also as actors who "individually and collectively, found ways to endure, fight back, and occasionally define their own destinies" and influence the course of history⁴². Third, as historian Stephanie Camp has suggested, Black women's history does not just add to our knowledge of U.S. history (and of history beyond U.S. borders) but changes radically what we know and how we know it. Therefore, this dissertation builds on the important teachings of the rich historiography now available on African American women⁴³.

⁴⁰ Lerner, *Black Women in White America*; Among other important pioneering contributions, figure a collection of essays penned by Black feminists published in 1982: Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave*; and Paula Giddings' 1984 book: Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*.

⁴¹ Higginbotham, "Beyond The Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women in History", 50.

⁴² Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Talk about Life in the Segregated South*, xxx.

⁴³ Some of this literature has been particularly influential to this research: Davis, *Women, Race & Class*; hooks, *Ain't I A Woman? Black Women and Feminism*; Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave*; Janiewski, *Sisterhood Denied: Race, Gender, and Class in a New South Community*; Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*; Bynum, *Unruly Women, The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South*; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*; Clark-Lewis, *Living in, Living out: African American Domesticity in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940*; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women*

Examining the violence targeting African American women at Angola is an important part of this research project. In this work, I consider incarceration in conjunction with other forms of racialized and gendered violence aiming to keep Black women at the bottom of the social hierarchy. I suggest that incarceration can be understood as a particular form of state-sanctioned violence, and that it is to be interpreted as one element among a series of white Louisiana's responses to Black claims for freedom and equality (which also include extra-legal violence, and legalized segregation). This project was particularly influenced by the concept of intersectionality coined by legal scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw, who, in 1989, put into words the idea that Black women's experiences cannot be understood only by the lens of gender or only by the lens of race, but that they are caught in "interlocking" systems of oppression⁴⁴. Black resistance to white supremacy also constitutes an important aspect of this project. I was therefore particularly attentive to scholarly work that reveals the resistance strategies that African Americans demonstrated in different contexts⁴⁵.

In this chapter, I present a brief historiography of African American women and incarceration, in order to highlight the specific contributions of my research to this emerging field of study. I then present the state of scholarly knowledge on the history of the Louisiana carceral system and what new elements and new perspectives this project brings.

and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920; Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History*; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*; Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*; Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*; Feimster, *Southern Horrors. Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching*; Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom. Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*; Berry, "Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe": Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia; Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South*; Vaz, *The "Baby Dolls". Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition*; Simmons, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans*; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*; Berry and Gross, *A Black Women's History of the United States*; Miles, *All That She Carried. The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts."

⁴⁴ Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics"; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 230.

⁴⁵ In addition to works previously mentioned, see: Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920*; Kelley and Harold, "The Historiography of the Black South: From Reconstruction to Jim Crow"; Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*; Prince, *The Ballad of Robert Charles*.

1.1 Historiography of African American women and incarceration

This project seeks to contribute to a growing interest in the historical documentation of prisoners' lives in prison. Until recently, the historiography of incarceration in the U.S. (not presented here) largely focused on institutions, prison officials, prison reformers and penology. Conversely, prisoners' own voices have been silenced in most of the historical research on American prisons⁴⁶. As historian Michael Meranze advances in the foreword of the anthology *Buried Lives*, it is only in the 2000s that historians finally changed their focus to prisoners, which allowed them a fuller and different understanding of incarceration and carceral institutions. This new historiography also helps to "prevent the memories of inmates from being buried by those institutions"⁴⁷. Similarly, Mary Ellen Curtin invites other historians to overcome the stigma of criminality that had, according to her, been a barrier to the development of the field, especially when it comes to Black prisoners who have suffered a "double ignominy":

Prison history (as distinct from sociology) as a field has recently begun to come into its own, but it has eluded the profession, in part because prisoners are still stigmatized, even by their own families, and prison reformers - and historians - can easily be mischaracterized as the naïve defenders of guilty criminals⁴⁸.

Gender (which is central to this dissertation) also made its way late into studies of incarceration, as carceral institutions were assumed to be male by definition. Indeed, despite the existence of female-only custodial institutions, most of female prisoners have historically been held in male institutions, where they represented a small portion of the carceral population and were often an

⁴⁶ McDowell, Harold, and Battle, *The Punitive Turn: New Approaches to Race and Incarceration*; This was not unique to the field in the U.S. In 2007, Peter Spierenburg remarked that historians had not yet told how prisoners lived in prison and spent their days, stating in his groundbreaking work on Dutch prisons of the 17th and 18th centuries that: "In historical writing life inside prison has hardly been a subject at all". Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience*, 172.

⁴⁷ Michael Meranze, Foreword in Tarter and Bell, *Buried Lives : Incarcerated in Early America*, xi.

⁴⁸ Curtin, "Please Hear Our Cries", *The Hidden History of Black Prisoners in America*, 33.

after-thought. Women's law-breaking was perceived through the lens of strict norms for womanhood: considered as social outcasts even worse than men, women prisoners' incarceration in inadequate and squalid quarters was often coupled with sexual exploitation or abuse. According to literature, women have also often been submitted to harsher discipline in carceral settings where their presence was perceived as troublesome⁴⁹.

The first sociological studies concerning female prisoners date from the period of the Great Depression. In 1934, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck's *Five Hundred Delinquent Women* constituted a quantitative study of the population of a long-established female reformatory (Massachusetts Reformatory) and examined how this institution sought to "reform" the women in its custody. In the 1960s, David Ward and Gene Kassebaum's *Women's Prisons: Sex and Social Structure* and Rose Giallombardo's *Society of Women: A Study of a Woman's Prison* focused almost exclusively on the female "inmate culture" and were interested in homosexuality, role playing, and kinship (or pseudo family) formation among female prisoners. These first studies used as references previous studies on male prisons such as Donald Clemmer's in which he coined the term "prisonization" or Gresham Sykes's on the "pains of imprisonment", all the while trying to establish the particularities of women's institutions. They often concluded that men and women adopt different codes in prison largely because they are socialized differently by society at large⁵⁰. Given the sources available for this research (see chapter 2), my work only scratches the surface of the prisoners' culture at Angola's female camp (in the sense these authors gave to 'culture'). However, it seeks to bring elements allowing for an understanding of Black women's close environment at the camp, which influenced greatly that culture.

Estelle B. Freedman and Nicole Hahn Rafter were the first historians to take interest in women who were incarcerated within U.S. carceral institutions since the 19th century. They both authored pioneering studies in the 1980s, the same period other Western historians started working on

⁴⁹ Dodge, "'One Female Prisoner Is of More Trouble than Twenty Males': Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835-1896", 907-9.

⁵⁰ Glueck and Glueck, *Five Hundred Delinquent Women*; Kassebaum and Ward, *Women's Prison*; Giallombardo, *Society of Women: A Study of a Woman's Prison*; Sykes, *The Society of Captives*; Clemmer, *The Prison Community*.

women's prisons with the same feminist lens⁵¹. Together, their work points out that interpretations derived from men's carceral spaces are insufficient without a gendered analysis. They show how women labeled criminal were often represented as the negation of the feminine ideal. They were treated in the legal system not only as guilty of a crime (defined in legal terms) but also as 'deviants' from the moral prescriptions associated with the role of mothers and wives. Freedman's *Their Sisters' Keepers* examines the crucial role of female reformers in the creation of female custodial institutions in the U.S. She argues that staff in these female reformatories acted in a benevolent and "sisterly" fashion towards incarcerated women whom they intended to "reform" and transform into more respectable women, i.e. women who would respect social norms. Freedman provides a model for feminist studies in the emerging field of scholarship on women's prisons. However, focusing only on one type of institutions (i.e. reformatories, which generally held white women), Freedman misses the racial differences that existed in the treatment of alleged female criminals in custodial institutions.

Conversely, Rafter's *Partial Justice* pays attention to the institutional control and discipline implemented in women's reformatories as well as in the women's units located within predominantly male prisons and penitentiaries. Rafter provides the first extensive overview of U.S. institutions holding women convicted of felonies or misdemeanors, although she focuses on the examples of three quite distinct institutions located in Tennessee, Ohio, and New York. She reveals the inferior treatment these institutions reserved for women, not only because of their marginal numbers but also because of stereotyped views of gender. Rafter's contribution was to identify how race, class and gender shaped women's prosecution and commitment rates, as well as their prison experiences. Importantly, she also challenges Freedman's conclusion of a "sisterly" approach, showing that, alongside those women's reformatories with a "therapeutic" ideal, jails and prisons were developed to hold most convicted women in degrading custodial conditions. Her focus on class also allows her to identify the patronizing attitudes that female reformers coming from middle-class and elite backgrounds held towards the working-class

⁵¹ Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930*; Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women in State Prisons, 1800-1935*; For studies outside of the U.S., see for instance: Perrot, *L'impossible prison: recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIXe siècle*; Strange, "The Criminal and the Fallen of Their Sex: The Establishment of Canada's First Women's Prison, 1874-1901"; Carlen, *Women's Imprisonment: A Study in Social Control*; Zedner, "Women, Crime, and Penal Responses : A Historical Account."

women who found their way in the criminal justice system and female institutions (an attitude that Cheryl Hicks also documented among the first Black female reformers in New York⁵²). This dissertation builds on Rafter's perspective, also shared in Anne M. Butler's later *Gendered Justice in the American West*, on women's harsh conditions in custodial institutions designed and built with men in mind⁵³.

Since the 1990s, the subfield of the history of women's prisons has seen many fascinating contributions, including works on African American women, which I will present below in more detail. This particular body of work is in dialogue with recent historical contributions to the analysis of mass incarceration internationally, a phenomenon that historians and other scholars have invested with increasing interest in the last decades, highlighting its white supremacist foundations and the enduring legacies of slavery and colonization⁵⁴.

Recent research on African American women and incarceration offers perspectives on the gendered nature of punishment before and after the Civil War (the bulk of them looking at the period between 1865 and 1915). This body of work seeks to complicate the received picture of the American prison, prisoners being "implicitly male" in previous schools of interpretation⁵⁵. Following Mary Ellen Curtin's pioneering study of Alabama male and female prisoners, Talitha LeFlouria and Sarah Haley both published works on Black women confined in 19th century Georgia convict camps and chain gangs, thereby also bringing to light the gendered nature of convict leasing. Their studies use non-traditional sources (medical records for LeFlouria's and music for Haley's) and complement each other. They both argue convincingly that Black over-

⁵² Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935*.

⁵³ Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West: Women Prisoners in Men's Penitentiaries*.

⁵⁴ See for instance: Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*; Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965*; Chase, *Caging Borders and Carceral States: Incarcerations, Immigration Detentions, and Resistance*; Forman, "Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration"; Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*; Mauer and Sentencing Project (U.S.), *Race to Incarcerate*; Thompson, Muhammad, and Hernández, "Constructing the Carceral State"; Wacquant, "Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the Race Question"; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*; Anderson, *Convicts: A Global History*.

⁵⁵ Dodge, "One Female Prisoner Is of More Trouble than Twenty Males", 908.

representation in penal settings can be understood as part of the structure of a racially segregated society, an argument that this dissertation adopts as well⁵⁶.

It is generally admitted that this early phenomenon of mass incarceration did not stem from a rise in Black crime, but rather was a direct response to African Americans' attempt to emancipate themselves from whites' social and economic control, and to gain their political autonomy⁵⁷. African American women's historical over-representation in U.S. prisons has likewise been documented. Anne M. Butler shows that, in at least five states, southern and otherwise, the numbers of prisoners had started to rise by 1866. Butler argues that Black women were sentenced more heavily than their white counterparts for equivalent crimes, and that white women were mostly sent to county jails or reformatories while Black women were sentenced to hard labor in penitentiaries, thus suffering harsher conditions⁵⁸.

Throughout U.S. history, negative stereotypes and derogatory representations of Black womanhood have informed the dominant society's views, marking African American women as objects rather than subjects, and as the inferior "Others" of society⁵⁹. These stereotypes were reinforced by a pseudo-scientific discourse aiming to identify and control the "criminal class", as well as by a constant demonization in the white press⁶⁰. Whites' visions of hypersexualized Black female body served the purpose of rationalizing Black women's oppression in carceral settings and elsewhere, in particular through sexual exploitation and sexual violence. This argument, developed by Talitha LeFlouria's *Chained in Silence* after Kali Gross' *Colored Amazons*, and

⁵⁶ Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*; LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South*; Haley, *No Mercy Here : Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*.

⁵⁷ Thompson, "From Researching the Past to Reimagining the Future, Locating Carceral Crisis and the Key to Its End, in the Long Twentieth Century."

⁵⁸ Butler examined prison registers in Louisiana, Texas, Kansas, Nebraska and Montana. Butler, "Still in Chains : Black Women in Western Prisons 1865-1910."

⁵⁹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

⁶⁰ Historian Khalil Gibran Muhammad demonstrates that reliance on crime statistics have contributed to the notion of a Black "criminal class" characterized by its moral weakness. Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*; According to historian of the Southern U.S. Edward L. Ayers: "Virtually every issue of every Southern newspaper contained an account of black wrongdoing; if no episode from nearby could be found, episodes were imported from as far as necessary: black crimes perpetrated in the North were especially attractive". Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, 153; Cross-examining white newspapers and court records, historian Kali N. Gross divulges obvious distortions about female defendants, showing the press offered "a space for the public to purchase stories of black depravity". Gross, *Colored Amazons*, 11.

Cheryl Hicks' *Talk With You Like a Woman*, is also instrumental to my own undertaking, as my research is interested in documenting the various forms of violence Black women were subjected to during their incarceration by the Louisiana state. Also crucial to this dissertation (see chapter 8) is LeFlouria's argument concerning the distinction between slavery and incarceration being connected to Black women's bodies. Indeed, even if convict leasing was rendered possible by the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which allows for the subjection to slavery or involuntary servitude "as a punishment for crime", this system of coercion differs from slavery because it does not rely on the sexual exploitation of Black women's reproductive capacity. In the contrary, even with the prevalence of sexual violence inflicted on Black female prisoners, pregnancy and childbirth were considered as problematic for productivity, an argument that I also defend in this project⁶¹.

This dissertation also builds on studies of northern women's prisons and reformatories, such as pioneering scholarship by historians Cheryl Hicks and Nicole Kali Gross and literary scholar Saidiya Hartman, which are useful to understand how reform projects and rehabilitation ideals unfolded in particular ways when the incarcerated individuals were both African American and women⁶². Their works also demonstrate that the over-representation of African Americans among female prisoners (which was also largely the case in Louisiana, see chapter 3) was not a "southern exception". With *Colored Amazons*, Kali Gross uses the study of alleged crimes and experiences of incarceration at the Eastern State Penitentiary as a lens to explore the lives of marginalized Black women in turn of the 20th century Philadelphia. Gross argues that poverty and discrimination created conditions for Black female crimes, overwhelmingly larceny. Even if this dissertation does not analyze in depth the crimes allegedly committed by Angola's Black female prisoners, it seeks to highlight the dire circumstances of their lives in the outside, where they were restricted to poorly-paid menial jobs where they were often vulnerable to white authority and abuse. The originality of Gross's work was to combine quantitative data (statistics derived from penitentiary records) and qualitative data (newspapers, court records, and penitentiary archives), a methodology that inspired the one I adopted for this dissertation (see chapter 2). With the use of trial transcripts, she is able to get women's palpable voices, which Gross compares to

⁶¹ LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*, 8.

⁶² Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman*; Gross, *Colored Amazons*; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*.

the caricatured and vilified renditions of their lives and alleged crimes that one finds in the press⁶³.

In turn, Cheryl D. Hicks focused her attention on New York at the turn of the 20th century and on two institutions, a reformatory (Bedford) and a female prison (Auburn). Her work on these institutions exposes Black working-class women's frequent and violent encounters with police, criminals, neighbors, husbands or lovers, or with other women. Through her sources (police, court and institutional records including parole board files), Hicks reveals that these women found domestic work (which was the occupation for most of them) exploitative, exhausting, and unrewarding. Some women took up sex work as a way to cope with poverty, even if that exposed them to more violence. Hicks also shows that working-class Black women who failed to conform to Black middle-class reformers' ideal of respectability were left unprotected. Part of the originality of Hicks' *Talk with You Like a Woman* is to present the justice system from within, and to highlight its agents such as parole officers and judges⁶⁴.

Gathering numerous and various sources on turn of the 20th century New York and Philadelphia, Saidiya Hartman examines in her groundbreaking *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, what it meant to be free for the second or third generation born after the official end of slavery. Hartman comments both southern and northern conditions for Black women. Describing the Great Migration as "a fugitive movement from life lived under the heel of white men", she examines the ways in which Black women refused to be governed and sought to assuage their "hunger for more and better" in their own lives⁶⁵. Hartman depicts a "choir" of Black women struggling to create autonomous lives despite economic exclusion, material deprivation, racial enclosure and social dispossession. However, their dreams of better futures and their assertive attempts were met by great amounts of resistance from the dominant society. In an attempt to force Black women to conform to gender norms established by white middle-class and elite social leaders, as well as to keep them in servile roles, northern whites created vagrancy and wayward laws, reinforced police and social services surveillance, and instituted women's reformatories and other

⁶³ See for instance Gross, *Colored Amazons*, 102, 105, 125-126.

⁶⁴ Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman*.

⁶⁵ Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 48, 55.

custodial institutions. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* was particularly inspirational to this dissertation project because of its methodology of “collage” of various aspects of Black women’s lives and its crafting of an original narrative. Together with *Talk with You Like a Woman* and *Colored Amazons*, it provided an understanding of Black women’s realities and challenges during the first part of the 20th century, which I built from, in order to develop an understanding and to compose a narrative about Louisiana Black women during Jim Crow.

This project also builds on previous studies to argue that violence was used not only to dominate incarcerated African American women, but also to forcibly extract economic profit from their labor. Mary Ellen Curtin was one of the first historians to document African American women’s coerced labor in carceral settings, although, focusing on Alabama convict camps and mines, she examined Black prisoners of both male and female genders. Curtin’s work reveals how Alabama mines offered the most dangerous, and often deadly, working conditions for prisoners. Her study also demonstrates that those mines were sites of important prisoners’ resistance. Curtin argues that women were at times more assertive than male prisoners, and that “they especially resented attempts to force them to wear prison clothing, limit their freedom of movement, and control their sexual activity”⁶⁶. Conversely, Talitha LeFlouria demonstrates that incarcerated women were defeminized and masculinized by institutional practices. For instance, some women in Georgia convict camps had to wear male uniforms and perform industrial tasks. Consequently, LeFlouria argues, the occupational restriction of Black women to domestic work in the outside world did not necessarily apply to incarcerated women who, through their coerced labor, played a role in the industrialization of the New South⁶⁷. In chapter 7, I examine Black women’s coerced labor at Angola, and building from Curtin and LeFlouria, I argue that many of them were assigned at tasks commonly conceived as masculine, such as plowing or cutting sugar cane.

Examining Bedford Reformatory’s archives, Cheryl Hicks demonstrates that race influenced prison authorities’ assumptions about incarcerated women. For instance, whereas white “fallen women” were paroled to enter factory work in New York, Black women were paroled for

⁶⁶ Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*, 38.

⁶⁷ LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*; LeFlouria, ““Under the Sting of the Lash””; LeFlouria, “Sewing and Spinning for the State: Incarcerated Black Female Garment Workers in the Jim Crow South”, in Wood and Ring, *Crime and Punishment in the Jim Crow South*.

domestic service (some of them, including New York natives, were even sent to the South) and subjected to employers' close control. Hicks's book was the first to introduce historians to the practice of domestic parole⁶⁸. Also examining Black women's domestic labor under parole (in her case in Georgia), Sarah Haley conceptualized their "domestic carceral servitude", in order to show the importance of the white home in the power structure put in place by the state to hold Black women⁶⁹. Examining Black women's forced labor for white families at Angola, this dissertation builds on Haley's concept of "domestic carceral servitude", and argues that in Louisiana the white home was instrumental to the carceral scaffolding in similar fashion as it was in Georgia (see chapter 7).

Both LeFlouria and Haley document the use of corporal punishment and sexualized forms of violence to forcibly extract labor from unwilling captives turned into disposable laborers. Their research is critical to this project, which documents the centrality of labor and the variety of Black women's labor assignments at Angola (see chapter 7). Other southern penal farms presented many standard features in common with Angola. Consequently, works on Parchman, Mississippi, as well as on Texas farms helped me to articulate the inscription of prison violence and coerced labor in spatial terms⁷⁰. For instance, Telisha Dionne Bailey's research on Parchman demonstrates that, in the 20th century, Black women assumed great economic importance to the state through their physical exploitation⁷¹.

This project also seeks to document the impact of carceral violence on Black women's bodies (see chapter 8 in particular), and to do so relies on previous historical studies. LeFlouria's examination of medical records reveals a high mortality rate among Black female prisoners

⁶⁸ Hicks, *Talk with You like a Woman*, chap. 8.

⁶⁹ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, chap. 4.

⁷⁰ On Mississippi, see for instance: Cox, *Goat Castle: A True Story of Murder, Race, and the Gothic South*, chap. 11; Taylor, *Down on Parchman Farm: The Great Prison in the Mississippi Delta*; Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery*; McWhorter, "The Trusty: A Sociological Analysis of an Inmate Elite"; Bailey, "'Please Don't Forget About Me': African American Women, Mississippi, and the History of Crime and Punishment in Parchman Prison, 1890-1980"; On Texas, see for instance: Blue, *Doing Time in the Depression*; Chase, *We Are Not Slaves: State Violence, Coerced Labor, and Prisoners' Rights in Postwar America*; Perkinson, *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire*; Walker, *Penology for Profit: A History of the Texas Prison System, 1867-1912*; Jach, "'It's Hell in a Texas Pen': Life and Labor in the Texas Prison System, 1849-1929" No major work has been published yet on Cummins penal farm in Arkansas.

⁷¹ Bailey, "'Please Don't Forget About Me'", 35.

affected by serious health issues such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, influenza, malarial fever, all resulting from incarceration conditions favorable to the spread of disease. LeFlouria also argues that incarcerated Black women were victims of “social rape”, a physical and psychological oppression by which women were forcibly defeminized and masculinized, for instance by forcing them to wear “stripes” or by shaving their heads⁷².

Dovetailing with LeFlouria’s analysis of the gendered racial violence in Georgia convict camps, Haley describes the camps as “a theatre of black female violation that included rape and pornographic performative rituals of violence and humiliation”⁷³. Corporal punishments such as flogging that were reminiscent of slavery, solitary confinement, straitjackets, balls and chains, were experiences shared by prisoners in the various male penitentiaries, female prisons, and reformatories Haley studied. Historians have also discussed the occurrence of rape, sometimes confirmed by recorded births during incarceration. During the Jim Crow period, violence over Black women’s bodies was a powerful tool of control by dominant forces in prison. While this was also true of the outside world, it was especially the case in prison, due to the isolated and hidden spaces. Through this violence, white supremacy was “exercised, reformulated and redeemed”⁷⁴.

As mentioned, this project is particularly centered on the question of Black women’s resistance within the carceral settings. It builds from scholarly work documenting the gendered forms of resistance in other prisons, penitentiaries or reformatories. In male-dominated settings, women were sometimes able to use the officials’ bafflement to their own advantage. Historian Mara Dodge reminds us of the last-resort strategies incarcerated women employed for their everyday survival:

Indeed, women may have been very well aware of, and exploited, the ways in which their very presence in the penitentiary disrupted penal regimes. Female prisoners may have sought to use their gender as a weapon, perhaps the only defence they had from the degradations and humiliations of prison life⁷⁵.

⁷² LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*.

⁷³ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 252.

⁷⁴ LeFlouria, ““Under the Sting of the Lash,”” 367.

⁷⁵ Dodge, ““One Female Prisoner Is of More Trouble than Twenty Males””, 914. In 1980, during the “Dirty Protest”, Republican female political prisoners at Armagh prison, Northern Ireland, used their menstrual blood as a weapon of

As historian Anne M. Butler shows, women incarcerated in Western U.S. male penitentiaries resorted (alternatively or simultaneously) to both attitudes of compliance and attitudes of resistance as tools of power. To avoid physical abuse, to get their support in their pardon requests, or more generally to improve their everyday life during incarceration, women sought protection from the most powerful males (usually penitentiary wardens and guards). Despite high risks of retaliation (often in the form of corporal punishment or possibly sexual violence), women also challenged authority by exercising verbal resistance (sarcasms, curses, noises, humor), by planning escapes, and in some cases by self-mutilating or committing suicide⁷⁶. Haley reveals that in Georgia convict camps, Black women also resisted. In addition to looking for ways to escape, they sabotaged production tools, were insubordinate, and pretended to be sick⁷⁷. Mary Ellen Curtin documents Black prisoners' resistance in Alabama mines, where they variously challenged authority by writing letters and petitions, asking for better conditions, talking back, and even resorting to arson⁷⁸. Likewise, this dissertation reveals the various ways in which Black female prisoners attempted to undermine institutional control over their lived experiences of incarceration. It also highlights how their experiences of living and surviving in Jim Crow Louisiana shaped how they adapted to institutional life. Building on the work of historians mentioned above, this dissertation highlights the ways in which Black women's experiences of incarceration differ from white women's and from Black and white men's.

My study of Black women's resistance at Angola also builds on recent historical research on prisoners' resistance in U.S. prisons, such as Ashley Rubin's work on Philadelphia's infamous Eastern State Penitentiary during the 19th century. Rubin challenges philosopher Michel Foucault's depiction of a disciplinary prison in which prisoners are virtual automatons, i.e. passive recipients of power and agents of their own punishment. Crucial to my understanding of Black women's resistance at Angola, Rubin also shows that resistance is often limited in small

resistance, and challenged the state by transgressing gender norms. See: O'Keefe, "Menstrual Blood as a Weapon of Resistance" Thank you to Fran Alexander for mentioning this event.

⁷⁶ Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West*.

⁷⁷ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, chap. 5.

⁷⁸ Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*.

actions that do not have a big impact on institutional power, but nevertheless demonstrate prisoners' agency⁷⁹.

This dissertation embraces historical arguments of the legacies of slavery in the construction of the carceral state⁸⁰, all the while exploring the distinctive features of incarceration during Jim Crow. This research combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, in contrast to previous historical work on African American women's incarceration (with the exception of Gross's book⁸¹). Another originality of this dissertation is that archival sources were systematically questioned to assess experiential differences between Black women, the main subject of study, and their white counterparts (a question previously only tackled by Butler⁸²).

In contrast with previous research focusing on one aspect of incarceration, this dissertation tries to provide an holistic view of Black women's experiences in Angola's carceral settings, by building bridges between topics of space, time, labor, health, violence, and sexuality, thereby promoting understanding of the racialized and gendered construction of women's carcerality. Furthermore, this dissertation is also original because of its geographical focus, since, as discussed in detail in the following section, for the most part, historical studies of Louisiana carceral institutions have neglected women. Indeed, because most institutional sources generally talk about men when they talk about prisoners, this research also contributes to a larger context of the study of gender.

⁷⁹ Rubin, "The Consequences of Prisoners' Micro-Resistance."

⁸⁰ Sellin, *Slavery and the Penal System*.

⁸¹ Gross, *Colored Amazons*.

⁸² Butler, "Still in Chains."

1.2 Historiography of Louisiana's carceral system

Despite record incarceration rates and despite being infamous for its penitentiary system, Louisiana does not occupy a large place in the historiography of American prisons, even of southern ones. So far, only a few historians' publications have shown how the Louisiana penal system, and Angola in particular, fits into the gloomy portrait of U.S. incarceration before the modern era of mass incarceration. However, Angola has received the attention of many scholars of other disciplines, as well as that of journalists and others. Altogether, this literature provides a portrait of Louisiana carceral institution since its creation in the antebellum period to the present-day. This literature suggests that the history of the institution is entangled with Louisiana politics, with slavery and plantation culture, and with white supremacy. It provides information on the carceral regimes but very little on the prisoners themselves, particularly when it comes to (Black) women. My dissertation seeks to fill some of these gaps.

In 1970, the historian Mark T. Carleton submitted his dissertation, which marked the first historical account of Louisiana's carceral institutions. Shortly afterwards, he published it under the title *Politics and Punishment: The History of the Louisiana State Penal System*⁸³. Carleton's central argument is that, from its creation in 1835, the management of the state penitentiary was largely influenced by Louisiana politics, partisanship, and nepotism. The Louisiana penal system was "thoroughly politicalized", and corrupt politicians used it to make deals with greedy businessmen, award job positions to relatives and political friends, and advance their political agendas. Carleton also argued that, for over a century in Louisiana, the pursuit of profit was the leitmotif for penitentiary authorities, whereas the adoption of any penal reform was perceived as an unnecessary expense to the state of Louisiana. According to Carleton, this quest for profit, coupled with the fear of Black autonomy (and its corollary, the desire to quash Black freedom), led to the creation of policies and enforcement of practices of brutal exploitation of African Americans, who constituted the overwhelming majority of state prisoners. Because the

⁸³ Carleton, "The Political History of the Louisiana State Penitentiary: 1835-1968"; Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*.

penitentiary records used in this dissertation were not deposited in the State Archives until the late 1980s, Carleton did not have access to them. Consequently, his study relied mostly on newspapers and on official penitentiary reports and legislative debates, and necessarily put the focus on the institutional level, without discussing much the fate of the individuals incarcerated, let alone the female prisoners. Carleton's book - a pioneering work at a time when historians almost ignored penology and neglected the study of U.S. prisons - remains a reference today, despite weaknesses that have been pointed out in more recent works⁸⁴.

Recently, Christina Pruett Hermann produced a dissertation in history on the Louisiana State Penitentiary system, which remains unpublished. Among other aspects, she examines forced labor practices between 1835 and 1935. She demonstrates that Louisiana created a distinctive system of forced labor that survived the Civil War and Emancipation, to be later extended to larger numbers of captives. Her quantitative analysis is of particular interest to this project. Hermann created a database from a sample drawn from the records of nearly 10,000 prisoners admitted to LSP over the period 1927-1935. Her database provides interesting elements of comparison with my own data. While women are mentioned in her work, Hermann does not discuss their conditions according to a gender-based analysis. She also assumed that women's quarters at Angola were not racially segregated, when in fact they were so from the very beginnings of the penal farm. Hermann's dissertation only confirms Carleton's argument about continuities within the Louisiana carceral system between the convict leasing period and the resumption of state control, although she differs from Carleton in arguing that economic considerations prevailed over racial ones⁸⁵. My own analysis also suggests that race was what determined the institution's policies and practices, sometimes even at the detriment of economic rationale.

In 2015, literary scholar Dennis Ray Childs published *Slaves of the State*, a very original work combining literature, African American studies, and history. Childs seeks to establish lineages between Angola penitentiary's past with present-day mass incarceration. (Childs had also

⁸⁴ For a critic of Carleton's work, see for instance: Cardon, "'Less Than Mayhem': Louisiana's Convict Lease, 1865-1901."

⁸⁵ Hermann, "Specters of Freedom: Forced Labor, Social Struggle, and the Louisiana State Penitentiary System, 1835-1935."

previously written about convict leasing at Angola plantation in the late 19th century⁸⁶.) Adopting Saidiya Hartman's posture of Afropessimism, Childs argues that the "chattel principle" marks all Black lives in the U.S., making differences between past and present forms of domination "virtually indecipherable, if not completely inexistent". He argues that the Louisiana carceral system constitutes a form of "state slavery" that he describes as "an unhistorical crime" in the context of an "unachieved emancipation"⁸⁷. For this demonstration, Childs uses a variety of sources, including prison songs and photographs of prisoners, to spark his own story telling⁸⁸. Childs' work has inspired greatly my project. In particular, his research approach demonstrates great care and empathy towards his subjects, whether they are participants in today's Angola rodeo or members of yesterday's Angola Black Minstrels troupe.

Alexander Tepperman's recent (unpublished) dissertation has also proven useful to my understanding of Angola prison culture in the interwar period, when prison populations increased drastically, resulting in dire overcrowding across the U.S. Tepperman examines a random sample of 2,398 LSP prisoner files (out of 14,575 total admissions over the period) and compared Angola to other State and federal penitentiaries. Despite focusing on the male prisoner population, his work is pertinent to this project because it examines the scale of prisoners' resistance at Angola and across the country, resistance that aimed to destabilize prison regimes and to make demands for better conditions of incarceration. Tepperman's analysis of the trends circulating in the field of corrections in the U.S. during the period 1870-1940 also proved useful in situating the Louisiana penal practices within the national context of prison reforms⁸⁹.

Some other recent works document Black incarceration in Louisiana from the inception of the state institution in the 19th century, providing crucial contextual information for this dissertation. Jeff Forret explores the presence of enslaved Black prisoners at the Baton Rouge penitentiary, prisoners who were later transferred to the Board of Public Works. In his article, Forret argues

⁸⁶ Childs, "Angola, Convict Leasing, and the Annulment of Freedom."

⁸⁷ Childs, *Slaves of the State. Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary*, 114.

⁸⁸ Music ethnographers Alan Lomax and Harry Oster both visited Angola and recorded prisoners singing and playing music. See: Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*; Oster, *Prison Worksongs Recorded at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola, La*; See also: Garriss, "Le blues des prisonniers à Angola (1930-1960)."

⁸⁹ Tepperman, "Strange Bedfellows"

that race and gender determined labor assignments at the penitentiary, enslaved women being “employed washing and mending”. Interestingly, his 2013 article also discusses the children of incarcerated women who were born at the penitentiary and therefore became state property⁹⁰. These children were the main focus of Brett Josef Derbes’ chilling article, in which he asserts that they were the living testimonials of the horror endured by enslaved women in the penitentiary. The state’s disregard for Black lives went as far as authorizing the selling of these children at public auction⁹¹. In turn, Connie Nobles’s 2000 article discusses the ‘invisibilization’ of women and children in the archaeological study produced on the old Baton Rouge penitentiary, and insists on the importance of their uncomfortable presence in Louisiana’s carceral history⁹².

Also focusing mostly on the antebellum period, John Bardes’ groundbreaking (unpublished) dissertation examines enslaved prisoners in Louisiana jails and workhouses rather than its state institutions. His work shows that: “Louisiana developed an expansive prison system for the purported transformation of resistant enslaved persons into thoroughly subjugated servants through specialized penal labor regimes”⁹³. Bardes argues that the southern model of convict leasing, adopted after the Civil War and Emancipation, take root from antebellum ‘*géôle de police*’, a penal institution conceived as a “modern” form of punishment devoted to disciplining criminals and deviants through forced labor. Enslaved African Americans were put to work in chain gangs, which, states Bardes, were themselves an importation from the French colonies in the Caribbean.

Historian LaKisha Michelle Simmons and feminist scholar Jessica Calvanico have each produced studies of the House of the Good Shepherd, the only specifically female carceral institution in Louisiana that held Black girls during Jim Crow. Operated in New Orleans by white Catholic nuns, the House of the Good Shepherd was the only biracial, albeit segregated, reformatory in the South. It held mostly girls or young women convicted of sexual misconduct or misdemeanor.

⁹⁰ Forret, “Before Angola: Enslaved Prisoners in the Louisiana State Penitentiary.”

⁹¹ Derbes, “‘Secret Horrors’: Enslaved Women and Children in the Louisiana State Penitentiary, 1833–1862, 1833–1862.”

⁹² Nobles, “Gazing upon the Invisible: Women and Children at the Old Baton Rouge Penitentiary”; Wurtzburg and Hahn, “Hard Labor: History and Archaeology at the Old Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.”

⁹³ Bardes, “Mass Incarceration in the Age of Slavery and Emancipation: Fugitive Slaves, Poor Whites, and Prison Development in Louisiana, 1805-1877”, 40.

Both Simmons and Calvanico's works inform us of the moral standards imposed on Black female youth⁹⁴. Unfortunately, the House's individual records were not preserved, which prevents further research on the links between this reformatory and LSP, such as retracing women and girls who served sentences in both institutions.

In addition to historical scholarship, several studies in other disciplines have proved useful to this research. A number of Louisiana students have worked on Angola's troubled history, mostly focusing on the institutional history, and on penal reforms⁹⁵. Most of these students used their position as LSP staff members (current or former) to conduct their investigations and to access privileged information on LSP administration, staff and prisoner population. Their studies function as first-hand accounts of Angola prison life (from its staff's perspective), as well as important insights into the penology (or lack of professional penal policy) deployed by LSP officials. Among these works, the most useful to this dissertation were Joseph Mouledous's, Raymond Paul Leblanc's and Charlotte Mae Richardson's masters thesis in sociology, all submitted to Louisiana State University between 1959 and 1964. Joseph Mouledous's study focused on the internal organization, relationships between management and staff, managerial philosophy and objectives, and the "inmate social system". Very critical of penal practices introduced in the late 1950s, Mouledous condemned LSP's increased bureaucratization. He found out that impersonal and formal relations between prisoners and staff had replaced the informal and personal methods deployed previously by the staff, resulting in the collapsing of the system of rewards and punishments used to maintain order. Mouledous nevertheless deplored the persistence of attitudes among staff used - since the creation of the penal farm - to brutally "handle" the prison coerced labor force in order to make a good crop⁹⁶.

⁹⁴ Simmons, *Crescent City Girls*, chap. 5; Calvanico, "Carceral Girlhoods: The House of the Good Shepherd and 'the Problem' of the Girl in New Orleans."

⁹⁵ For instance, see: Russell, "A Study of the Commitments to the Louisiana State Penitentiary 1938-1939"; Bedsole, "Commitments to the Louisiana State Penitentiary 1939-1940, 1945-1946"; Lafaye, "Adult Correctional Institutions in Louisiana"; Hyde, "Developments in Correctional Services for Adult Felony Offenders in Louisiana"; Allgood, "A Sociological Analysis of the Transition of the Louisiana Penal System"; Richardson, "Women in Prison: A Study of Social Relationships"; Mouledous, "Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System"; LeBlanc, "Selected Limitations on the Organization of Treatment in a 'Modern' Prison."

⁹⁶ Mouledous was employed by the Louisiana State Department of Institutions from 1957 to 1961 as a classification officer at LSP and finally as assistant director of the Division of Probation and Parole. His wife Elizabeth worked at the women's camp. Mouledous, "Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System."

Raymond Paul LeBlanc collected and compiled data over a four-year period during which he was employed in the Department of Classification at LSP. His study was supported by the penitentiary administration, who even assigned two prisoners to type his manuscript. The focus of his research was to review the first ten years of implementation of LSP's rehabilitation program, which he labeled a "shift from punitive to 'treatment' methods"⁹⁷. LeBlanc focuses on the infamous 1951 "heel-slashing" protest, performed by thirty-seven white male prisoners on themselves, which created a "disturbance" in the prison regime. This engendered much publicity, and its outcomes were amplified by the fact that the protest occurred shortly before an election-year cycle. Although he does not acknowledge the seriousness of prisoners' grievances against their incarceration conditions, Leblanc argues that the prisoners' protest (which he improperly calls a riot) acted as a "pervasive force" to bring changes in the penal practices employed at LSP. Leblanc concludes, however, that the new prison and new penal approach were not as successful as intended because there was too great of a contrast with the old Angola camps and the brutal methods used by the camp captains (several of whom remained on staff despite the institution's declared intention of terminating the culture of brutality).

Charlotte Mae Richardson's study is the only existing study dedicated to the women incarcerated at Angola. Through interviews she conducted in the fall of 1958 with twenty-nine white women (i.e. all white women at LSP at the time) and twenty-five Black women (a third of the seventy-one detained), Richardson examined the social groups existing within the women's quarters. Richardson's study is very much in the vein of Clemmer and Sykes' books on male "inmate culture", which were released shortly before her investigation, and is in the same vein as Rose Giallombardo's book on women at the Alderson federal penitentiary or John Irwin and Donald Cressey's book on "inmate culture", which were all published in the few years following Richardson's study⁹⁸. Indeed, Richardson was interested in affiliations between women, their subculture, their behavior, the power dynamics at the women's quarters, and women's role playing and kinship (or pseudo family) formation. Among other findings, she found correlation

⁹⁷ LeBlanc, "Selected Limitations on the Organization of Treatment in a 'Modern' Prison", 27.

⁹⁸ Clemmer, *The Prison Community*; Sykes, *The Society of Captives*; Giallombardo, *Society of Women: A Study of a Women's Prison*; Cressey and Irwin, "Thieves, Convicts and the Inmate Culture."

between job assignments in the prison and leadership positions among prisoners⁹⁹. Her descriptions of women's daily lives within the women's camp was useful to this research, especially to document the new women's quarters they occupied in the second half of the 1950s (see chapter 5) as well as their labor assignment (see chapter 7). However, much of her thesis relies on the information she got from white female prisoners and obscures the voices of the Black women she interviewed. In addition, without denying the segregation between Black and white women, her portrait does not question the differential treatment the institution reserved to these groups, nor the centrality of race to explain these differences.

In the 1990s, journalist Anne Hamilton Butler published two books on Angola in collaboration with her husband and Angola's former warden, C. Murray Henderson (whose position obviously informed their perspective on the subject). Based on interviews with Angola staff, newspaper accounts and other sources, these provide interesting insights¹⁰⁰. In 2006, prior to new levee construction, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made an archaeological study of Angola. This study provides some interesting clues on the occupation of space, useful to my understanding of Angola (see chapter 4)¹⁰¹. Finally, sociologist and Angola museum volunteer Marianne Fisher-Giorlando has been conducting historical research for a number of years on women incarcerated at LSP since its 19th century origins in Baton Rouge. She has published scholarly articles on the antebellum penitentiary¹⁰². In addition, she published in *The Angolite* (the prison magazine) a series of three substantive articles written in collaboration with Kerry Myers (who was at the time editor of the prison magazine while incarcerated). Their series documents several significant milestones in the history of women at the penitentiary¹⁰³. Fisher-Giorlando has also presented her archival research at historical conferences¹⁰⁴.

⁹⁹ Richardson, "Women in Prison"

¹⁰⁰ Hamilton and Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary: A Half-Century of Rage and Reform*; Hamilton and Henderson, *Dying to Tell: Angola, Crime, Consequence, Conclusion at Louisiana State Penitentiary*.

¹⁰¹ United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, "Archaeological Data Recovery at Angola Plantation, Sites 16WF121 and 16WF122 West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana."

¹⁰² Fisher-Giorlando, "Women in the Walls: The Imprisonment of Women at the Baton Rouge Penitentiary, 1835-1862"; Fisher-Giorlando and Dotter, "Murder in Black and White. A Crime and Media Story in Antebellum Louisiana."

¹⁰³ Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women. The Historically Unseen of Louisiana's Prison System, Part 1: 1835-1901"; Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women. The Historically Unseen of

In contrast to the paucity of published historical research, quite a few works have examined Angola penitentiary's modern days. For instance, Daniel Evan Atkinson's dissertation speaks of the destruction of African American bodies at Angola where, he argues, Black male prisoners are "an infinitely available and therefore, ultimately renewable resource"¹⁰⁵. Since 2000, at least three dissertations have been produced on *The Angolite* magazine, all of which highlight prison culture¹⁰⁶. The Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair, an event organized every spring and fall on the penitentiary grounds, was also the object of recent research,⁷ including a study by Kathryn Gillespie, who discusses the complex entanglements between violence, anthropomorphism, anti-Blackness and colonialism¹⁰⁷. Religion at Angola, which became predominant in prisoners' lives over the past half-century (particularly in the context of life sentences without the possibility of parole), has been studied recently as well¹⁰⁸.

In addition, a number of video documentaries have been produced, of which *The Farm* is the best known¹⁰⁹. Wilbert Rideau, former editor of *The Angolite*, and involved in this latter project, also wrote two books on his experience of detention at Angola¹¹⁰. A number of writings were also dedicated to the Angola 3, a group of political prisoners who were members of the Black

Louisiana's Prison System, Part 2: 1901-1950"; Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women. The Historically Unseen of Louisiana's Prison System, Part 3: 1950 to a Home of Their Own."

¹⁰⁴ For instance: Fisher-Giorlando, "Women at the Walls: Dispelling the Myths of Women in Louisiana's Antebellum Penitentiary"; Fisher-Giorlando, "Voices of the Women: Media Representations of Women in Louisiana's Prison News Magazine, the Angolite."

¹⁰⁵ Atkinson, "Angola Is America", 210.

¹⁰⁶ Churcher, "Self-Governance, Normalcy and Control : Inmate-Produced Media at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola"; Whiddon, "'To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest': Words, Walls, and the Rhetorical Practices of the Angolite"; Kennedy, "'Reflections From Exile': Exploring Prisoner Writings at the Louisiana State Penitentiary."

¹⁰⁷ Gillespie, "Placing Angola: Racialisation, Anthropocentrism, and Settler Colonialism at the Louisiana State Penitentiary's Angola Rodeo"; See also: Gould, "The Rock, the Farm and Emerald City : Visibility and the Representational Politics of the Prison System in the United States."

¹⁰⁸ Gaskill, "Moral Rehabilitation: Religion, Race, and Reform in America's Incarceration Capital."

¹⁰⁹ Barens et al., *Prison Terminal: The Last Day of Private Jack Hall*; Garbus and Rideau, *The Farm: Angola*; Harbert, *Follow Me Down: Portraits of Louisiana Prison Musicians*.

¹¹⁰ Rideau, *In the Place of Justice: A Story of Punishment and Deliverance*; Rideau and Wikberg, *Life Sentences: Rage and Survival Behind Bars*.

Panthers Party and were confined for decades in the solitary cellblock. The last member of the Angola 3 to be released, Albert Woodfox, recently published an account of his confinement¹¹¹.

Conclusion of chapter 1

This dissertation tries to fill some gaps in previous research by providing an examination of women incarcerated during Jim Crow and particularly of African American women. In contrast to most previous studies, this research examines individuals' experiences of incarceration and explores the gendered and racialized practices of the institution used to control women. Further, this dissertation seeks to highlight Black women's resistance and survival strategies. This study also provides new statistical information on the women's carceral population.

By placing incarceration in a broader understanding of state violence against African American women, and by tracing links between state violence and the larger context of the Jim Crow South, my work will contribute to the knowledge of Black women's lives in Louisiana. Along with Kali Gross, I argue that there is not much separating convicted women from other Black women in their experiences of oppression during Jim Crow, except what they experienced inside custodial spaces, and the trauma they potentially carried afterwards. Therefore, examining Angola's Black women - who sometimes left more traces in public records and newspapers than other "ordinary" working-class Black women - can inform us of Black women's everyday challenges under Jim Crow. Shedding light on a particular aspect of the Nadir of African American history, my research will also add another chapter to the history of white supremacy.

Considering the attention that Louisiana prisons, especially Angola, have received since Louisiana has become "world capital of incarceration", it seems even more relevant to document

¹¹¹ Woodfox, *Solitary. Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*; See also: King, *From the Bottom of the Heap: The Autobiography of Black Panther Robert Hillary King*. Albert Woodfox died in August 2022 during the final stages of the writing of this dissertation.

the past of its carceral system, and to provide new background information to scholars and others interested in its present. Conversely, studies of Louisiana's present incarceration, as well as activism regarding prisons and the incarcerated (including prison reform and prison abolitionism), have proved useful to entrench my work in current concerns.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY, DATA AND SOURCES

As historian Annette Gordon-Reed famously stated about the enslaved: “The voices we would most like to hear – the voices that we most need to hear – are silent”¹¹². This dissertation, primarily interested to document African American women’s lived experiences, also had to deal with the scarcity of sources written by African American women about their own past. During this research, no first-hand account of the Black female experiences at Angola was found. Therefore, the overall challenge for this research was to document prisoners’ experiences using “documents from above”, i.e. sources written by those who saw them as problematic, who wanted to control them, and that in fact offer only glimpses into their lives¹¹³. This chapter describes in detail the sources collected for this project, and then discusses the approach taken to examining them critically. It later presents the Angola Women’s Database built for the project, the data it contains, and the quantitative methodology applied. Finally, some central concepts to the qualitative analysis deployed in this research are exposed and the qualitative methodology is presented in detail. This dissertation demonstrates the input of a hybrid methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. The strategy used here, building a prosopography, allows for highlighting the common features of a particular segment of the carceral population (i.e. Black women), as well as the variety of profiles it contains¹¹⁴. It also allows us to raise concerns about the ways in which individuals’ sentences were issued, experienced and terminated.

¹¹² Annette Gordon-Reed, “Slavery’s Shadow”, *New Yorker*, October 23, 2013. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/slaverys-shadow> Accessed August 2, 2022.

¹¹³ Gibson, “The Everyday Life of Inmates: Alternative Sources for Italian Prison History”, 25.

¹¹⁴ Verboven, Carlier, and Dumolyn, “A Short Manual in the Art of Prosopography.”

2.1 Primary sources

As detailed below, this research relies on a large body of primary sources, most of them accessible in various Louisiana archives. To reconstruct the experiences of African American women at Angola State Penitentiary, I have gathered a variety of sources: prisoners' records and penitentiary reports, criminal court records, newspaper clippings, photographic and archaeological material, and prisoners' newspapers. These sources come from different years, even different decades, each divulging only a tiny portion of the whole story. Nonetheless, I believe that, from these "collage" of sources, these women's world and experiences emerge. When considering this body of sources, a close look was given to various forms of testimony when available (testimony in court, prison newspaper, clemency requests or other prisoners' correspondence) to track down prisoners' resisting voices, although these are admittedly scarce. Apart from admission records, where women marginally appear (since they constituted less than four percent of LSP admissions), there is a quasi-absence of traces left by African American women within the penitentiary archives, which was the biggest challenge I had to contend with during this research.

The first and main corpus of sources consists of penitentiary records. Forty-three volumes related to the period 1866-1960 have been preserved, although these constitute an incomplete collection¹¹⁵. For the period 1901 to 1925, I used registers containing lists of persons received at

¹¹⁵ They include: Conduct Records, Death Reports, Fugitive Warrant Registers, Receiving Station Registers, Registers of Convicts Received, Convict Records, and Indexes for Official Registers of Inmates, Prisoner Escapes, and Prisoners Received. The original volumes are part of: Collection P1980-353, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. Most of these volumes are also accessible online through the Family Search platform. The FamilySearch organization in Salt Lake City, Utah, hosts the "Louisiana State Penitentiary Records, 1866-1963, Correctional Institution Records Angola". <https://FamilySearch.org>. Accessed September 26, 2020. Hereafter cited as LSP Collection.

The A series consists of: Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911; Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916; Volume 18, no. 9901-12855, 1916-1921; Volume 19, no. 12856-15643, 1921-1925.

The B series consists of: Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923; Volume 25, no. 14603-15500, 1923-1925; Volume 26, no. 15501-16150, 1926; Volume 27, no. 16151-16824, 1925-1926; Volume 28, no. 16825-17500, 1926-

the penitentiary with information regarding their age, physical description, education (or rather literacy), race, profession, crime, sentence, residence, and expiration of sentence (a total of 25 data points). These admission registers constitute a first series of sources for the database I created (hereafter called A series). In addition, twenty of the Convict Records volumes contain individualized information and concern the period 1902 to 1960, although they are complete only for the period 1925-1935. These records, which constitute a second series of sources for the database, do not present a complete file on each person (hereafter called B series). For instance, they contain no letters addressed to prisoners or written by them, which I was hoping to find¹¹⁶. In addition to the data points also contained in the Admission Records volumes, the Convict Records provide information on previous residence, court action and calculation of sentence. Most importantly for offering a glimpse into everyday life at Angola, the Convict Records indicate when prisoners revolted against prison rules, and were subject to different degrees of punishment (the records provide the nature of the punishment, including the number of strokes tendered by the lash, a very short description of the infringement of prison rules, the name of the Captain, and the date) or, conversely, were granted rewards (i.e. time credits or “good time”) for their labor and their compliant behavior (there, the records provide the nature of this labor or exceptional contribution, and dates). The entries corresponding to punishment inflicted to prisoners took a primary importance in this dissertation. They were read not only as an “inventory [of] the acts of violence and terror” inflicted by the state institution, but also as evidence of prisoners’ reluctance to comply with penitentiary rules and regime, and resistance to whites’ domination over African Americans, and to men’s domination over women¹¹⁷. They also reveal some of the brutality of oppression applied against Black women’s bodies, as much as the labor assignments (mentioned in the “good time” credits for each prisoner) reveal the heavy toil

1927; Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928; Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929; Volume 31, no. 18801-19450, 1929-1930; Volume 32, no. 19451-20100, 1930; Volume 33, no. 20101-20749, 1930-1931; Volume 34, no. 20751-21399, 1931; Volume 35, no. 21401-22050, 1931-1932; Volume 36, no. 22051-22699, 1932; Volume 37, no. 22701-23350, 1932-1933; Volume 38, no. 23351-23999, 1933; Volume 39, no. 24001-24650, 1933-1934; Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935; Volume 41, no. 25301-25950, 1935; Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936.

¹¹⁶ The biennial report 1934-1936 states: “The penitentiary has a folder for each inmate. In this folder is assembled all the information about him, letters from him, letters to him, letters from his people, letters to them. Literally thousands of letters come to the penitentiary about the prisoners and each letter is answered promptly. These letters may be said to reveal the moral side, the social side, the spiritual aspect of the institution”. Source: Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (hereafter LLMVC). Quote on page 31.

¹¹⁷ LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*, 16.

of coerced labor on these women. Although they do not constitute a consistent and complete series throughout the period of my study, the two sets of penitentiary records described above provided the foundation for my database of incarcerated women over the period 1901-1935, which is the segment for which information was available on every woman admitted. In addition, I integrated to the database the entries corresponding to female prisoners from the only surviving volume entitled “Conduct Record”, providing information on punishments inflicted to about 1,600 LSP prisoners (including 56 women) during the period 1908-1913¹¹⁸. The methodology used to design the Angola Women’s Database is presented below in details, as well as its purposes.

The Louisiana administration produced reports, sometimes on an annual basis, other times on a biennial basis, all which constitute another body of sources for this project. Over the 1901-1961 period, only the following years are documented: 1901 to 1917, 1931/1932, 1934 to 1950, and 1952 to 1961¹¹⁹. Most problematic is the gap in the institution’s reports, which, according to historian Mark Carleton, ceased publication between 1918 and 1932, leaving many aspects of prison management and life opaque¹²⁰. These reports contain mostly information on agricultural and (later) industrial production, construction, major events (such as floods or fires) and financial data regarding the penitentiary. They contain very little on the incarcerated themselves. Reports usually contain only a bit of recurring statistical information on the persons incarcerated (such as race, gender, occupation before incarceration, place of birth, crime committed), which allowed me to make comparisons and determine trends over time (see chapter 3). They also usually contain texts from the penitentiary chaplain attesting to religious activities and commenting on the incarcerated men and women’s morale and potential for reform. Reports also contain the physician’s report on hospital admissions, the health of the incarcerated and the causes of death, as well as comments on living conditions, such as diet, water supply, etc. Despite their

¹¹⁸ Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection.

¹¹⁹ The following annual reports are available in different archival collections: 1901, 1931/1932, 1940/1941, 1942/1943, 1943/1944, 1944/1945, 1955, 1956/1957, 1957/1958, 1958/1959, 1959/1960, 1960/1961, 1961/1962. The following biennial reports are available: 1902-1903, 1904-1905, 1906-1907, 1908-1909, 1910-1911, 1912-1913, 1914-1915, 1916-1917, 1934-1936, 1936-1938, 1938-1940, 1940-1942, 1945-1947, 1948-1950, 1962-1964. In addition, the following statistical reports are available: 1941-1942, 1942-1943, 1952-1953, 1954-1955, 1955-1956, 1956-1957; 1957-1958, 1959-1960. See Bibliography for details.

¹²⁰ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 114.

importance for prison life, other conditions such as housing, safety, labor hours, discipline, are rarely discussed in these reports. In later years, the report was sometimes associated with a statistical report, published separately and containing more detailed information on the persons incarcerated. Interestingly, some of these official reports contain photographs of the facilities and of prisoners, often used to promote the (agricultural) success of the institution but mask its (custodial) faults. Together, these reports were useful to this dissertation for understanding the “managerial philosophies” displayed at LSP. One of the biennial reports was exceptional on that matter. Reproducing some of the correspondence between LSP general manager and some (white) prisoners’ relatives, it made visible the paternalistic and contemptuous attitude towards the captives, which was often hidden in other reports providing purely administrative accounts¹²¹.

Legislative documents supplement penitentiary reports, as they also contain reports made by penitentiary officials to the State, as well as information on the legislative committees investigating the operations of different State agencies, such as the penitentiary (as well as other correctional institutions, or medical facilities)¹²². Other investigating committees, mostly appointed by successive Governors, delivered recommendations for reorganization or improvements at Angola. Their final reports, and in some rare cases their working materials such as verbatim transcripts of interviews with staff, have survived and provide some precious information about labor and life conditions at Angola, and the challenges met by the different parties (administration, staff and their families¹²³, or the incarcerated)¹²⁴. In addition, some records of the penal administration have survived, mainly incoming and outgoing correspondence from officials working at the Board of Institutions, the State agency that exercised control over

¹²¹ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC.

¹²² See for instance: Legislative Documents 1904, call number J87.L8 1904C, LLMVC.

¹²³ Considering the distance of Angola from the closest town, St. Francisville, most of staff members were housed inside the perimeter of the penitentiary with their wives and children. See chapter 7 for a discussion on these families’ interactions with some of the Black female prisoners who served their sentence as coerced domestic laborers.

¹²⁴ Report of the Advisory Committee to the Department of Institutions, 1944, Call number HV98.L8 L68, LLMVC; Joseph W. Sanford and Charles V. Jenkinson, “State of Louisiana, Recommendations for Reorganization of the Penitentiary System”; Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folders 215, 215.1, 215.4, 215.5 & 215.6, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans; Transcripts, October 1960 & March 1961, State Penitentiary Investigations, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Collection P1981-497, folder 34, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

the penitentiary from its headquarters in Baton Rouge. The bulk of this correspondence concerns the period 1952 to 1964, and only a minor part of it concerns directly the incarcerated, although correspondence concerning production, construction, administration or other material aspects divulge some information on labor, living conditions and daily challenges met by the incarcerated. These sources reveal information on the often invisible presence of other persons living at Angola: wives and children of the warden, the captains and the guards, or about people living nearby who had an interest in what was going on inside, especially residents of the West Feliciana parish who interacted with the penitentiary administration, for instance about prisoners' potential and actual escapes. These sources also give an indication of outsiders - individuals, companies or organizations - interested in the penitentiary's activities or population and their occasional presence on the penitentiary grounds. Among these records concerning the Louisiana State Penitentiary, some precious documents have been found, such as prison population census reports, recommendations from officials or from investigation committees, an employee's handbook, as well as various surveys or reports. Monthly reports prepared by the warden for the director of Institutions from May 1957 to November 1961 are also accessible, as well as Board meeting minutes for the same period. Two other collections of correspondence related to Angola were found emanating from the Attorney General's office, one for the period 1916-1917 and the other for 1956-1960¹²⁵. These provided a number of exchanges concerning parole and other matters related to the penitentiary prisoners and the administration of justice. Together, these sources were useful in understanding the administrative functioning of LSP and the practical concerns that its officials dealt with.

Some of the police, court and pardon records available for the period of the study were also collected in an effort to gather information on the circumstances that brought African American women to Angola, and in order to understand their judicial path within the Louisiana penal system. Archives related to pardon cases are centralized (although incomplete), as it is the sole prerogative of the governor of the state of Louisiana to approve pardons or commutations of sentences. This is not the case for police or court records, which constituted one of the challenges

¹²⁵ Collection P1981-495, Louisiana State Penitentiary Correspondence 1952-1964; Collection P1981-497, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records; Collection P1983-580, Louisiana State Penitentiary Board Meeting Minutes; Collection P1978-139, Box 1, Attorney General Correspondence 1916-1917; Collection P1980-416, Boxes 14, 15, 23, Attorney General Papers 1956-1960, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

of this research. Louisiana has sixty-four parishes (the equivalent of counties in other U.S. states), and each parish has a sheriff's office (often also responsible for the parish jail), a district attorney's office and a clerk of the court, which speaks to the number of agencies (not to mention local police forces and local jails) involved in the arrest and handling of the African American women who were later incarcerated at Angola (for the period 1901-1935 they originated from sixty-three parishes). Unfortunately, I was not able to visit sheriffs' and district attorneys' offices throughout the State of Louisiana¹²⁶, although I collected archival material pertaining to the New Orleans Police Department¹²⁷. Police sources attest to an over-representation of African Americans among the individuals arrested, especially for less serious offenses, which in turn stresses the importance of police harassment in the process of criminalization of many Black Louisianans. If this dissertation focuses on the experiences of incarceration, and the ways in which Black women were victimized by the penitentiary regime, it cannot be forgotten that incarceration was the culmination of a process that started with arrest by local or parish police forces who were deployed to control the Black presence in a white-dominated world¹²⁸.

Criminal court records constitute another body of sources mobilized for this research. Using the list of women I built from penitentiary registers and pardon records, I produced an inventory of

¹²⁶ This was my objective for a field trip planned in 2021, which had to be cancelled because of the sanitary crisis.

¹²⁷ For instance, Reports on Homicides "consist of a standard form and a detailed narrative report usually prepared by the investigating officer". New Orleans (La.) Police Dept., Homicide Reports, 1893-1947, Call number TP205h, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library. This collection is partly accessible online through the Criminal Justice Research Center of Ohio State University: <https://cjrc.osu.edu/research/interdisciplinary/hvd/united-states/new-orleans>. In addition, I used the Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff's Penitentiary Receipt Book, which recorded all prisoners transported by the Sheriff to the penitentiary receiving station, to complement and cross reference with my database: Orleans Parish (La.) Criminal Sheriff, Penitentiary record book, 1896-1935, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library. The New Orleans Police Department also left some early 20th century archives comprising an incomplete, if pertinent, series of annual reports (1899-1914), for instance: Annual Report of Board of Police Commissioners and the Superintendent of Police of the City of New Orleans for the Year 1899, Call number TP-200, City Archives, New Orleans City Library. There are also identification pictures (mugshots), Bertillon cards, and other material from their Bureau of Identification. New Orleans Police Department Bertillon Card Collection, ca. 1890s-1925; New Orleans Police Department Mugshot Collection, ca. 1890s-1925, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library. Both collections (mugshots and Bertillon cards) are now available online: <https://cdm16880.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16880coll46> (accessed January 29, 2021). Unfortunately only a few of the women sentenced to the State Penitentiary could be found in these archival materials. The New Orleans Public Library also holds microfilm collections with arrest cards, which could be a useful source for further research.

¹²⁸ Clinton Clark, a Black labor organizer during the Depression, made the account of his arrests aimed at stopping his efforts towards the collective organization of sharecroppers and tenant farmers in Louisiana. See: Clark, Clark, and Davey, *Remember My Sacrifice: The Autobiography of Clinton Clark, Tenant Farm Organizer and Early Civil Rights Activist*.

criminal court cases organized by parish and by year. This inventory covers the period studied, i.e. 1901-1961, although it was largely incomplete for the segment 1942-1961, for which only pardoned women are listed. Each of the sixty-three parish courts was then contacted to inquire about locating their remaining criminal archives. Based on the accessibility of their material and the number of local cases, as well as logistical concerns, I visited over a dozen parish clerks of court, in addition to other archives holding materials pertaining to Orleans Parish and to Saint-John-the-Baptist Parish. The material collected in each location varied greatly in quantity and quality¹²⁹.

¹²⁹ Most parishes visited only had Minute Books (also called Docket Books) containing mostly information on the legal procedures, but no detail on individual cases. These were useful to understand the judicial process women went through before their conviction. A few parishes had Bills of Information and other documents pertaining to individual cases such as Notes of Evidence, Statements, Testimonials, Motions, Petitions, Bills of Exception, and Subpoena. The largest bulk of document is preserved at the New Orleans Public Library, which holds Orleans Parish criminal cases prior to 1931 (indexes are available at the Louisiana State Archives for part of this collection, and online for another part, which allows for research by name). Thanks to the indexes, I was also able to retrieve additional criminal cases concerning the same individuals. Those were cases either dismissed, leading to acquittal or involving individuals sentenced to the parish prison rather than the State penitentiary. This allows for a broader scope on these women's interactions with the legal system. For instance it shows that some of the women convicted of small larcenies and sentenced to LSP had served parish sentences before, which might contribute to explain the severity of their penitentiary sentence.

Table 2.1: Number of lower court cases researched and retrieved by parish (includes white and Black women)

Parish (location)	Number of cases researched	# of cases located in Minute books	# of individual records found
Caddo (Shreveport)	127	Not available (n.a.)	Not consulted ¹³⁰
Claiborne (Homer)	17	3 Not consulted	n.a. 14
East Carroll (Lake Providence)	35	34	Not provided
Madison (Tallulah)	45	36	n.a.
Ouachita (Monroe)	67	63	n.a.
Tensas (St. Joseph)	26	20	12
Saint Landry (Opelousas)	18	17	13
Lafayette (Lafayette)	14	n.a.	14
Beauregard (De Ridder)	26	18	15
Grant (Colfax) ¹³¹	19	19	3
Winn (Winnfield)	14	14	9
Bienville (Arcadia)	7	4	n.a.
Jefferson (Harvey)	25	n.a.	22
Orleans (New Orleans public library)	252	Not consulted	157
Saint John the Baptist (La. State Archives)	14	n.a.	2
Union (Farmerville)	7	7	n.a.

Sources: Index of cases 1898-1958, Caddo Parish Clerk of Court, Shreveport; Minute Books; Bills of Information, Claiborne Parish Clerk of Court, Homer; Minute Books, East Carroll Parish Clerk of Court, Lake Providence; Minute Books, Madison Parish Clerk of Court, Tallulah; Indictments and Informations Records 1914-1963, Volumes B-L, N-P, Ouachita Parish Clerk of Court, Monroe; Minute Books, 1920-1935, 1935-1945, 1945-1956; Bills of Information, Tensas Parish Clerk of Court, St. Joseph; Index Books; Minute Books; Bills of Information, St. Landry Parish Clerk of Court, Opelousas; Bills of Information, Lafayette Parish Clerk of Court, Lafayette; Index Books; Minute Books; Bills of Information, Beauregard Parish Clerk of Court, De Ridder; Minute Books, Volumes 7-16 ; Bills of Information, Grant Parish Clerk of Court, Colfax; Minute Books, Volumes B-F ; Bills of Information, Winn Parish Clerk of Court, Winnfield; Book of Indictment, Volumes C-E, Bienville Parish Clerk of Court, Arcadia; Bills of Information, Jefferson Parish Clerk of Court, Harvey; General dockets, 1880-1918, Louisiana Criminal District Court Orleans Parish 1880-1918, Collection VL350, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library; General dockets, 1901-1921, Louisiana First City Criminal Court, New

¹³⁰ All docket numbers were retrieved during a first visit to the Clerk of court and a request was placed to pull out individual cases stored in a warehouse. Unfortunately, the Clerk of court could not answer to my request during my stay in Louisiana.

¹³¹ All minutes books were available but bills of information (i.e. individual cases) were only available for a few cases because archives were destroyed in a fire. Source: "Courthouse at Colfax Partially Destroyed by Fire", *The Town Talk*, March 8, 1945.

Orleans 1901-1921, Collection VQA350, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library; General dockets, 1906-1921, Louisiana Second City Criminal Court, New Orleans 1906-1921, Collection VQB350, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library; Orleans Parish Criminal Courts Index and Docket Books 1918-1965, Collection S2005-006, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge¹³²; Affidavits 1906-1907, Collection S2000-023, Box 11, Saint-John-the-Baptist Parish Clerk of Court Colonial Documents 1757-1958, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge¹³³; Minute Books, Union Parish Clerk of Court, Farmerville.

In addition to the material pertaining to lower courts, I collected cases of individuals who appealed of their sentence to the Supreme Court of Louisiana (which was the only appeals court for criminal cases until 1982¹³⁴). Supreme Court handwritten files (as opposed to printed reports available on Nexis) should as a rule contain copies of the lower-court case, including attorney's arguments, depositions, written interrogatories, and trial transcripts. Yet, in a lot of the cases collected for this project, lower-court documents were missing. Those case records that were more voluminous (which run between fifty and one hundred pages in length) offered details that were precious in understanding the circumstances and context of the alleged crime (or rather a judicial representation of the event) and providing information on the alleged criminal's life before incarceration (such as her housing conditions, her neighbourhood, her family and relationships)¹³⁵. Supreme Court cases contain also additional documents, such as briefs for defendants, briefs for the State, and Louisiana Supreme Court opinion and judgement.

¹³² I am grateful to Lydia Glapion-Days, Human Resources Director, Orleans Parish Clerk of Court, for granting me the authorization to access this restricted material.

¹³³ I am grateful to Eliana DeFrancesh, Saint-John-the-Baptist Parish Clerk of Court, for granting me the authorization to access this restricted material.

¹³⁴ The jurisdiction of criminal appeals, except when capital punishment was imposed after a conviction of a capital offense, was transferred to appellate circuits as of July 1, 1982, following the adoption of Acts 1980, No. 843. Source : Historical Notes, Editor's and Revisor's Notes, Supreme Court Jurisdiction provided by the Louisiana Supreme Court Library. Before 1982, and according to the Louisiana Constitution, Article 7, Paragraph 10, "the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Louisiana applies whenever the penalty of death or imprisonment at hard labor is imposed".

¹³⁵ Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana*, xv.

Table 2.2: Number of appeal cases retrieved

	archives	# cases collected	Other cases available
Up to 1920	University of New Orleans	28	5
1921-1934	La. State Archives	9	9
After 1935	La. Supreme Court (microfilm)	46	24
total		83	38

Sources: Case Files, 1813-1920, Supreme Court of Louisiana Historical Archives, Collection MSS 106, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans; Supreme Court Records, 1931-1940, Collection P1986-089, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge; Louisiana Supreme Court Records, 1922-, Collection P1986-146, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge; Supreme Court Records (microfilm), Supreme Court Clerk of Court, New Orleans.

Collecting police and court records for this project allows for a better knowledge of the case that led to incarceration. Not only do these sources document legal procedures, but they also contain details that were revealed in the courtroom about the circumstances of the arrest, the alleged crime, and the accused. Among pertinent details provided by court records, victims are named and their relationships with the accused are exposed, stolen objects and their monetary value are disclosed. However, one of the greatest challenges for historians working with judicial archives is to be able not to be “formatted” by the norms and procedures that led to their writings¹³⁶:

What judicial sources do talk about? Is it possible to extract from procedures a “secular” voice, i.e. not built from legal terminology; or should we accept the self-reference of these sources that could only at best document power conflicts internal to the legal field¹³⁷?

¹³⁶ The term “formatted” is borrowed from: Cavazzini, « L'archive, la trace, le symptôme. Remarques sur la lecture des archives », 12. “Par « formatage » nous entendons les contraintes cognitives et discursives que toute source subit du fait d'avoir été engendrée par un processus de production, conservation et transmission engageant des dynamiques sociales et plus particulièrement institutionnelles. Plus précisément, ce terme vise la tendance de ce processus à incorporer à la source lesdites contraintes comme autant d'évidences non-questionnées (et que le « regard » de la source sur elle-même ne peut pas mettre en question). Nous posons axiomatiquement que n'importe quelle source peut être considérée sous l'angle de son « formatage »”.

[our translation] “By ‘formatting’ we mean the cognitive and discursive constraints that any source undergoes as a result of having been generated by a process of production, conservation and transmission involving social and more particularly institutional dynamics. More precisely, this term refers to the tendency of this process to incorporate said constraints at the source as so many unquestioned evidence (and which the source's ‘gaze’ on itself cannot question). We axiomatically assume that any source can be considered in terms of its ‘formatting’”.

¹³⁷ [our translation from] « De quoi parlent les sources judiciaires ? Ou pour mieux dire: quelle voix entend-t-on à travers celles-ci ? Est-il possible d'extraire, de la procédure, une parole « laïque », c'est-à-dire non charpentée par le

Indeed, the judicial archives were produced by institutions whose main purpose was social control and the imposition of behavioral and social norms. However, they precisely document the deviations and infractions to the norms the State is trying to impose through its legal institutions:

Judicial archives - whose task is precisely that of recording, from the point of view of the norm, these conflicting encounters [between the abnormal reality on the one hand, and the norm and the instruments which aim at its imposition on the other hand] - constitute a privileged place to collect traces of the occasions and conjunctures where there has been failure of the reduction to the norm¹³⁸.

While examining court and police archives on the women I studied, I took on the challenge that other historians using court and police records before me have taken: “have the sources talk by extorting information beyond their authors’ intentions”¹³⁹. Although they were rare in the criminal records I collected, I was particularly interested in the statements made in court by the African American women accused, because testimony might be one of the few instances where I could read their own words:

This is nothing like the judicial archives, which are the rough traces of lives that never asked to be told in the way they were, but one day [were] obliged to do so when confronted with the harsh reality of the police and repression. Whether they were victims, accusers, suspects or delinquents, none of these individuals ever imagined that they would be in the situation of having to explain, file a complaint, or justify themselves in front of the unsympathetic police. Their words were recorded right after the events had transpired, and even if they were strategic at the time, they did not follow from the same mental premeditation as the printed word. People spoke of things that would have remained unsaid if a destabilizing social event had not occurred. In this sense, their words reveal things that ordinarily went unspoken¹⁴⁰.

langage juridique ; ou alors doit-on se rendre à l’évidence d’une autoréférentialité de ces sources, qui, au mieux, ne seraient en mesure que de nous restituer les conflits de pouvoirs internes au champ juridique? » in: Cerutti, « Commentaire : Langage des acteurs, langage des historiens : de quoi parlent les sources judiciaires ? », 2.

¹³⁸ [our translation from] « Les archives judiciaires – dont la tâche est justement celle d’enregistrer, du point de vue de la norme, ces rencontres conflictuelles [entre la réalité hors-norme d’un côté, et la norme et les instruments qui visent son imposition de l’autre] – constituent un lieu privilégié pour recueillir les traces des occasions et des conjonctures où il y a eu échec de la réduction à la norme. » in: Cavazzini, « L’archive, la trace, le symptôme. Remarques sur la lecture des archives », 3.

¹³⁹ [our translation from] « faire parler les sources en leur extorquant des informations au-delà des intentions de leurs rédacteurs. » in: Cerutti, « Commentaire : Langage des acteurs, langage des historiens : de quoi parlent les sources judiciaires ? », 3.

¹⁴⁰ [translation from The Allure of the Archives, 2015] « Rien à voir avec l’archive; trace brute de vies qui ne demandaient aucunement à se raconter ainsi, et qui y sont obligées, parce qu’un jour confrontées aux réalités de la police et de la répression. Qu’il s’agisse de victimes, plaignants, suspects ou délinquants, aucun d’entre eux ne rêvait de cette situation où il leur faut expliquer, se plaindre, se justifier devant une police peu amène. Leurs paroles sont

It is crucial to acknowledge that the narratives contained in the testimony were filtered through the court clerk's transcription, and played to the presumed attitudes of the judge, the jury and the court. As Cavazzini as well as Farge warns us, these narratives were not necessarily produced voluntarily by the accused:

The [judicial] archive offers stories to read, but its purpose was not to make them known; Moreover, the authors of these stories did not want to communicate anything through their narratives: they were forced to speak by a brutal summons.

It is for other necessities [than producing narratives] that their words, deeds and thoughts have been transcribed¹⁴¹.

The following example shows the usefulness of court records for this research. Ethel T.'s statement in the courtroom exemplifies Black women's desire to improve their material conditions. Arrested in 1924 in New Orleans train station, Ethel T. was found with a bundle of clothes belonging to her white employers, with which she was hoping to flee to Houston. Ethel T. had allegedly stolen one fur, five silk dresses, two night gowns, a black hat, a slipover sweater, two skirts, two silk shirts, six lady's handkerchiefs, and a gentleman's brown overcoat. Asked by the court why she took the clothes, she simply replied: "Well, judge, the reason was because I wanted them, that's why". Left alone at home with her employers' infant while they were going to a Mardi Gras parade, the eighteen-year-old nurse seemed to have plainly seized the opportunity to get what she could never have afforded with her meager wages. She did not have time to wear this finery, which was valued at the exorbitant sum of \$364. Consequently she was charged with grand larceny and her bond was fixed at \$1,000. Pleading guilty, she found herself convicted, and sentenced to eighteen months to two years at hard labor. Only three weeks after the Mardi Gras, she was admitted to the penitentiary, where she spent fifteen months¹⁴².

consignées une fois suvenu l'événement, et si elles ont, sur le moment, une stratégie, elles n'obéissent pas, comme l'imprimé, à la même opération intellectuelle. Elles livrent ce qui n'aurait jamais été prononcé si un événement social perturbateur n'était suvenu. En quelque sorte, elles livrent un non-dit. » In: Farge, *Le goût de l'archive*, 12–13.

¹⁴¹ [our translation from] « L'archive [judiciaire] donne à lire des récits, mais son but n'était pas de les faire connaître ; d'ailleurs, les auteurs de ces récits ne voulaient rien communiquer par leurs narrations : ils ont été forcés à parler par une sommation brutale. » in: Cavazzini, « L'archive, la trace, le symptôme. Remarques sur la lecture des archives », 4; [our translation from] « c'est pour d'autres nécessités [que produire des récits] que leurs mots, leurs actes et leurs pensées ont été retranscrits. » in: Arlette Farge, *Le Goût de l'archive*, 16.

¹⁴² Note of evidence, Orleans parish criminal district court section D, docket number 21,214, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library; Convict Record #14934, Volume 19, no. 12856-15643, 1921-1925; Volume 25, no. 14603-15500, 1923-1925, LSP Collection.

In addition to the sources from the penitentiary, the courts, and the police authorities, pardon records were collected. Pardon decisions – which consist of one-page forms signed by the Governor with very little information on the person concerned by the decision: usually their name, conviction (crime, sentence, court involved and date), and nature of the pardon or commutation - were accessible for the entire period of my study¹⁴³. More interestingly, working papers related to (successful) pardons were collected¹⁴⁴. These papers provided additional details, such as clemency applications written by the incarcerated, petitions from relatives, employers or friends, as well as disciplinary records or recommendations from the penitentiary staff. These documents were useful in understanding the mechanisms of pardon, the arguments used by the applicants, and the elements that were taken into consideration by the Board to make a recommendation (see chapter 6 section 6.2.2).

Table 2.3: Number of women's pardon cases collected

	# Black women	# White women	Race not recorded
Period 1894-1901	1	0	0
Period 1958-1964	35	30	7

Sources: Collection P1985-076, Applications for Pardons 1894-1901; Collection P1991-044, Boxes 1-24, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

Another way to find prisoners' words was to look through the incoming correspondence of associations they might have written to in order to discuss their conviction, their conditions of incarceration or other matters related to their rights. For instance, the National Association for the

¹⁴³ Collection P1975-021, Pardons 1892-1940; Collection P1994-017, Pardons 1944-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹⁴⁴ Collection P1991-044, Boxes 1-24, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. A request to access this collection classified confidential was submitted to the Louisiana Board of Pardons on February 6th, 2019. I was granted access on April 11, 2019 and actually consulted this collection in 2020 during my next visit at the Louisiana State Archives. I am grateful to Mr. Francis M. Abbott, Executive Director, Louisiana Board of Pardons & parole, for granting me this authorization. In addition, one box of applications for pardon concerning the period 1894-1901 contained only one woman's application was found. Collection P1985-076, Applications for Pardons 1894-1901, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. A note that the papers related to the pardons are only concerning individuals whose pardon requests were answered positively, and that all other pardon applications were not preserved in these archives. Therefore, it is impossible to determine the extent of the pardon applications and their success rate, and this project could only examine the cases with a positive outcome, i.e. an earlier discharge from the penitentiary.

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, worked on prison issues at different levels. The association had correspondence with prisoners incarcerated throughout the United States, which offers historians a “counter-history of black resistances”¹⁴⁵. The archives of the local chapter of the NAACP were consulted in New Orleans, but the bulk of the pertinent correspondence was found in the national archives of the organization¹⁴⁶. As with other documents emanating from the incarcerated themselves, prisoners’ correspondence with the NAACP was used in this project to show how individuals made sense of their experience and the criminal identities ascribed to them, all the while acknowledging that censorship (from penitentiary officials who filtered the outcoming mail) might have affected its contents. Very little of these files actually concern women, however, they inform about incarceration conditions, and particularly about the brutal treatment inflicted to prisoners, and highlights the fact that Black prisoners saw these as injustices that needed to and could be corrected.

Scattered material pertaining to other advocacy organizations have been identified, located and collected. The Louisiana Prison Reform Association, the Volunteers of America and the

¹⁴⁵ Élodie Grossi has shown in her work about ‘insane asylum’ patients in Louisiana during Jim Crow that the use of correspondence to and from civil rights organizations such as the NAACP was critical: “While revealing individual stories about patients, they also offer unique narratives about family members and patients’ resistance against the hospitals’ apparatus and their undefeated will to protect their individual rights. Far from giving us a representation of patients as a passive crowd governed by medical authorities as institutional records tend to do, they stress out the importance of paying attention to micro-histories and individual voices when telling this narrative”. In: Grossi, “Behind the Hospitals’ Closed Doors: Medical Archives as Sites of Racial Memory and Social (In)Justice”, 45.

¹⁴⁶ Mss 028, Boxes 28.65, 28.66, 28.67, 28.68, 28.69, 28.70, 28.71, NAACP 1961-1965, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans; NAACP Papers, Part 8, Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, 1910-1955, accessed on The Historical Vault, January 3, 2020.

Here is the description that historian Mary Ellen Curtin made of this series of documents: “The papers consist of a variety of documents including court cases taken up by the NAACP as well as those cases the organization rejected; letters of urgency and complaint directed to the organization from prisoners throughout the nation, newspaper clippings detailing the imperfect workings of the justice system, and various and sundry correspondence from African Americans throughout the United States in trouble with the law. A snapshot of multifaceted conflicts faced by African Americans as they rubbed up against the criminal justice system, these documents show them escaping from prison, fleeing the threat of lynching, in trouble with the law, searching for lawyers, and as victims of police brutality. Black prisoners and their advocates believed they had an ally in the NAACP, and the organization took their complaints seriously. Because of its inadequate budget and its operation under extreme political duress, however, the NAACP had to make difficult choices concerning how best to use its resources. While the complaints of the incarcerated often could not be addressed, they still made their mark on the early NAACP leaders. In these documents, prisoners often emerge as the sanest voices in a corrupt, racist penitentiary system. State officials were more concerned with the appearance of compliance and legitimacy than with the truth of mismanagement and the realities of prison brutality. But prisoners were determined that their experiences be known”. In: Mary Ellen Curtin, “Please Hear Our Cries” in McDowell, Harold, and Battle, *The Punitive Turn: New Approaches to Race and Incarceration*, 35.

Volunteer Prison League were all involved in advocating for prisoners in Louisiana and their work reveal public concerns over carceral institutions, their objectives and their need (or potential) for reform¹⁴⁷. Internal documents and pamphlets produced by these groups, as well as prisoners' correspondence to advocates, were consulted to grasp the interactions between the people incarcerated at Angola and the outside world. In addition, the archives of the John Howard Association, a leading international reform organization whose U.S. headquarters were in Chicago, were also consulted¹⁴⁸. They provide a national perspective on some of the issues related to women and prisons, such as pregnancy in custody (see chapter 8). I have failed to locate archives that would attest to Black women's club activities in regard to incarceration in Louisiana.

Unfortunately, there was no oral history project involving women incarcerated at Angola during the period of my study. This project did not include interviews with women who might have survived or their descendants, for both ethical and logistical reasons¹⁴⁹¹⁵⁰. However, I did make use of some oral history interviews conducted with the children of staff members who grew up at Angola, and which provide some insight on their perspective on penitentiary daily life¹⁵¹. Among the few ethnomusicology projects conducted since the 1930s at Angola, only one was concerned with women's contributions to prison songs, and comprises a recording of one African American

¹⁴⁷ Serial HV 8987.A56, Prison Reform Association of Louisiana Collection, Williams Research Center, The Historical New Orleans Collection. The activities of the Volunteers of America at Angola appear in several newspaper accounts, however, no archival material pertaining to this organization was gathered for this research.

¹⁴⁸ Call number MSS Lot J, Boxes 1-4, 11-14 & 17, John Howard Association records 1898-1976, Chicago History Museum.

¹⁴⁹ First, their experience at Angola may have been a source of psychological trauma, requiring a healing context that this academic research cannot claim to provide. Secondly, it would have been difficult to identify these women or their descendants and to recruit them for interview purposes. Because of the stigma of incarceration, any descendants might not know about their mothers', grand mothers' or aunts' incarceration, or might be unaware of the details of their conditions at Angola. Finally, the logistics of this would have been impractical, especially because of the geographical distance involved.

¹⁵⁰ For oral history on life in the Jim Crow South, I relied on the project *Behind the Veil*. Behind the Veil digital collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/behindtheveil> Accessed August 3, 2022. These books presenting and analyzing interviews from *Behind the Veil* were also useful: Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad. *Remembering Jim Crow*; Valk et Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*.

¹⁵¹ Ellen Bryan Moore Oral History Interview, Mss. 4700.0537; Henry L. Fuqua, Jr. Oral History Interview, Mss. 4700.0021, LLMVC.

woman's voice¹⁵². A collection of poems written by Angola prisoners was also found, including some penned by women¹⁵³.

This project pays particular attention to publications made inside the penitentiary by incarcerated men and women, with oversight by the administration (including through the choice of the editors). The largest corpus of this latter type of publication is represented by *The Angolite*, which was first published in December 1952 as a weekly paper (usually from 6 to 12 pages), and is currently a bimonthly magazine. However, *The Argus* was the first prison publication produced at Angola. Beginning in 1940, it was edited by William Sadler alias Fred Jaynes, a white college-educated Mormon male prisoner at Camp E who had previous experience as a “newspaper man”¹⁵⁴. Only three editions of *The Argus* survive, and they contain very little about Black women¹⁵⁵. Its tone was humorous and it contained anecdotes about life in the camps¹⁵⁶. It also sponsored an annual poetry contest and campaigned successfully for newspapers to agree to run free of charge advertisements from prisoners with notice to apply for pardons¹⁵⁷. The publication of *The Argus* most probably stopped when Sadler was paroled in 1942, although he did not stop writing about Angola; in 1943, the *New Orleans Item* published a series of articles he had penned entitled “Hell on Angola”. *The Angola Messenger*, another paper for the prisoners, was also issued, this time by the chaplains who encouraged prisoners to contribute, but no copy has survived¹⁵⁸.

Unfortunately, I was able to consult only the 1953 editions of *The Angolite*, i.e. its first complete year, which together represent a bulky corpus of data to collect and analyze (about four hundred

¹⁵² Oster, *Prison Worksongs Recorded at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola, La*; Dennis Childs comments on Odea Matthews' song in: Childs, *Slaves of the State*.

¹⁵³ Louisiana State Penitentiary, “Souvenir Book of Poems: Poems by Angola prisoners”, Call number: La 811 Lou 1946, Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge.

¹⁵⁴ “‘Ear,’ Prison Editor, Eligible for Parole”, *Morning Advocate*, September 4, 1942.

¹⁵⁵ *Angola Argus*, Volume 1, numbers 5, 12, 14, Call number HV8301.A54, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans (hereafter LARC).

¹⁵⁶ “Angola Argus Makes Bow as Prison Paper”, *Caldwell Watchman*, January 10, 1941.

¹⁵⁷ “‘Ear,’ Prison Editor, Eligible for Parole”, *Morning Advocate*, September 4, 1942.

¹⁵⁸ “New Paper for Prison Inmates”, *The Bunkie Record*, June 26, 1942.

pages)¹⁵⁹. The publication began as a one-man operation, with prisoner William Sadler serving as editor. Sadler was back at LSP after being sentenced to another term in November 1952¹⁶⁰. In the pages of *The Angolite*, Sadler used the pseudonym “Old Wooden Ear” as a reminder of Angola’s brutal regime: he had lost his hearing after being beaten by Camp E Captain during his previous incarceration in 1938, allegedly for “being under the influence of dope” “during the line”¹⁶¹. During the 1950s, editions of *The Angolite* were cheaply mimeographed and distributed within Angola camps, although the publication also had an outside readership¹⁶². Sadler had the support of the penitentiary officials, who trusted him to “use the paper constructively [...] to keep prisoners informed and to build morale”¹⁶³. *The Angolite* documents everyday events at the prison, ranging from crop harvests to parole board reports. The tone of the paper was generally humorous, “light and cheery”¹⁶⁴. However, Sadler also used *The Angolite* to present prisoners’ concerns to the penitentiary administration, and to make suggestions of reform and change, transforming the newspaper into a “vehicle for connection” between prisoners and officials¹⁶⁵. The year 1953 is particularly interesting because Sadler also published in *The Angolite* what he called his “Angola Diary”. Entitled “Lest we Forget”, his short texts provided an account of some of the events he had witnessed in 1936 (during his previous sentence at LSP) and address above all the question of brutal treatment inflicted by prison staff on prisoners. *The Angolite* offers unique insight into prisoners’ concerns, in terms of material conditions. It also provides an understanding as to how the prisoner population at Angola thought about itself.

However, the most important caveat about the use of *The Angolite* in this research is that it was essentially a white male newspaper. Not only it was produced by Sadler (a white male prisoner),

¹⁵⁹ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, numbers 2-39, Volume 2, numbers 1-2, Call number I80, Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge.

¹⁶⁰ In between his sentences in Louisiana, Sadler had been incarcerated at the Tennessee State penitentiary where he was editor the prison publication *This is It*. Source: “Circulation: Limited”, *The Tennessean*, May 13, 1951.

¹⁶¹ Entry #25929, Volume 41, no. 25301-25950, 1935, LSP Collection.

¹⁶² At the end of its first year of operation, *The Angolite*’s press ran approximately 1,200 copies, “with over half being mailed outside”. In: Whiddon, ““To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest””.

¹⁶³ Dr. Edward D. Grant, Director of Institutions in Louisiana from 1952-1958, quoted in: Whiddon, ““To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest””, 229.

¹⁶⁴ “Angola Penitentiary’s Press”, *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1953.

¹⁶⁵ Whiddon, ““To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest””, 235.

but it also presented prison news that concerned mostly white male prisoners and often displayed derogatory content about Black people and about women (especially in its illustrations)¹⁶⁶. Female prisoners only contributed occasional short articles to *The Angolite*. For instance, in February 1953, Christine C., a white woman, and Virgie P., a Black one, contributed a page entitled “The Forbidden City”, where they recounted small and big events at Camp D, such as birthdays, a new prisoner’s arrival, or an upcoming trip to New Orleans to meet with the Board of pardon¹⁶⁷. No woman wrote in the prison newspaper for over a year, until Alice S., another white woman, took over in November 1955 as “Camp D correspondent” in a column entitled “Behind the lace curtain”, only to “give it up” after two months because “there is nothing to write about, and no one had handed in anything”¹⁶⁸. Again, these sources were produced within the penitentiary and under the administration’s scrutiny and censorship, so have been analysed as such. Nevertheless, *The Angolite* was useful to this research as a source of information on some of prisoners’ concerns.

Periodicals, specialized magazines and other contemporary publications also have a great importance in this project, and material was gathered from different sources. For instance, the Louisiana Corrections department produced specialized publications such as *The Reporter* (issued in 1956). The U.S. Department of Labor (National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor) produced several studies on prisoners’ labor that were useful to this research. For this project, I also collected hundreds of clippings from mass circulation newspapers, such as *The Times-Picayune*, *The New Orleans Item* or *The Louisiana Weekly* (an African American newspaper founded in 1925), as well as regional Louisianan newspapers such as *The Shreveport Journal*, *The Monroe News Star*, *The Town Talk* (Alexandria) or *The True Democrat* (St. Francisville). This project employed two databases (Historical American Newspaper and Newspapers.com) to collect articles through Boolean searches, in addition to consultation of microfilm. These were useful in retracing events at Angola that were covered by the press.

¹⁶⁶ Women’s prison publications were largely absent from U.S. carceral institutions. It was apparently at Alderson, the female federal penitentiary, that the first female publication started – *The Eagle* – in November 1933. The State Reformatory for Women in Shakopee, Minnesota, launched *The Reflector* in 1935. In the early 1940s, there were less than a dozen around the country. Morris, *Jailhouse Journalism. The Fourth Estate Behind Bars*, 116–17.

¹⁶⁷ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 2, February 1953.

¹⁶⁸ *The Angolite*, January 7, 1956.

Newspapers were also used to locate some pertinent details about individual women incarcerated at Angola (such as stories about their arrest or crime, their conviction, or their clemency application). Reports made in newspapers provide “a ready-formed narrative of the context of the crime”¹⁶⁹. However, while examining newspapers, I was also careful to detect common (mis)representations of Black women that white columnists and journalists inserted in their writings, as well as to take note of stereotypes about gender and race¹⁷⁰. Indeed, newspaper accounts revealed as much about dominant society’s views of African American women as about their alleged crimes and their circumstances, and more often than not participate in a “moralization project”¹⁷¹. Moreover, newspapers chose to highlight certain criminal cases over others, and certain aspects of these cases, in order to fit in the narrative they were trying to convey to their readership.

Finally, I used photographic and archaeological sources¹⁷², as well as first-hand accounts (see chapter 1), to recreate Angola’s physical environment: uniforms, meals, dormitories, cells, farm fields and other workspaces as well as the long history of the space (see chapters 4 and 5). During the period I study here, the penitentiary administration commissioned several photographers, mainly to document the institution’s farm installations and prisoners’ living quarters. These images were used in material published by the State, such as annual reports, pamphlets or in specialized magazines (such as *Louisiana Corrections Magazine*, *Louisiana Institutions Reporter*, *American Corrections Magazine*) or published by other organizations (such as the special issue of *The Architecture Forum* showing the new construction in 1954). The Angola Museum also holds unpublished photographs, but unfortunately its collections are not accessible for research.

¹⁶⁹ Williams and Godfrey, *Criminal Women 1850-1920*, 167.

¹⁷⁰ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 153.

¹⁷¹ Perrot, *Les ombres de l’histoire. Crime et châiment au XIXe siècle*, 271–81.

¹⁷² United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”; United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Archaeological Data Recovery at Angola Plantation, Sites 16WF121 and 16WF122 West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana.”

2.2 Reading against the grain to find underlying stories

As the inventory of sources presented above suggests, the main obstacle in my research has been the scarcity of direct accounts from the subjects of study, as well as the scarcity of details about women in the sources produced by others. The majority of the sources examined and analyzed for the purpose of this dissertation are indeed dry documents produced by the penitentiary administration or by the justice system (police or court) where the subjects have to be “tracked down”¹⁷³. These sources have to be questioned and interpreted using contesting sources (such as newspapers, investigations, or letters to advocacy groups) to reveal contradictions. Only through questioning official narratives and interpreting them in a way counter to their authors’ intention can we “discover the differential exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others”¹⁷⁴. Now, silences are indeed part of the writing of history, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds us: “Any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences”. These silences enter the process of historical production at different moments: for instance when the penitentiary authorities produced an annual report that almost completely silenced the custodial nature of the institution, when some penitentiary records were transferred to the Louisiana State Archives whereas others are missing, and of course, when historical narratives are produced such as this dissertation¹⁷⁵. The absence or quasi-absence of Black women in the existing historical narrative of Angola penitentiary speaks not only to their limited numbers but also to their marginal status within the institution. It also serves to mask the violence and domination that these subaltern subjects were confronted with¹⁷⁶. Silence, argues Trouillot, is not neutral, it is “an active and transitive process: one ‘silences’ a fact or an individual as a silencer silences a gun. One engages

¹⁷³ Perrot, *Les ombres de l’histoire*, 165.

¹⁷⁴ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 25.

¹⁷⁵ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 27.

¹⁷⁶ I use ‘subaltern’ here in reference to Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci as well as to Subaltern Studies developed by Indian scholars such as Ranajit Guha or Prathama Banerjee who adopted Gramsci’s concept and made it their own to develop their ‘history from below’. See for instance: Banerjee, “The Subaltern”; Guha, “The Small Voice of History.”

in the practice of silencing. Mentions and silences are thus active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis”¹⁷⁷.

Record keeping in a carceral setting has always been highly sensitive. It is still sensitive today, as revealed by a journalist who did an undercover assignment in a Louisiana private-run prison. Working as a guard, he was asked to fill in logbooks of ‘check-ins’ that were in fact not even performed¹⁷⁸. Therefore, it was important for me throughout this research to question and understand the context of production of these sources and to read them critically. “Reading against the grain” or “à rebrousse poil,” as suggested by Carlo Ginzburg, is necessary to reveal subtexts, and provide new layers of meanings, particularly to documents that were produced, not by the subjects of my study, but mostly by their oppressors¹⁷⁹. The power dynamics behind the production of the documents, and their keeping in archival collections need to be questioned, as Ginzburg suggests:

[...] in evaluating evidence historians should remember that every point of view of reality, in addition to being intrinsically selective and partial, depends on the power relations that condition, through the possibility of access to the documentation, the general image that a society leaves of itself¹⁸⁰.

When “the powerful speaks for the powerless” in the manner of a “ventriloquist”, it is necessary to apprehend these indirect sources critically, i.e. to contextualize them as being far from neutral documents¹⁸¹¹⁸². Most of the sources presented above represent Black women as problematic, a

¹⁷⁷ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 48.

¹⁷⁸ Bauer, *American Prison: A Reporter's Undercover Journey into the Business of Punishment*.

¹⁷⁹ Ginzburg, « Réflexions sur une hypothèse » in *Mythes emblèmes traces. Morphologie et histoire*, 351-364. Quoted by: Cerutti, “« À rebrousse-poil »”, 564.

¹⁸⁰ Ginzburg, *Rapporti di forza*, 2000, quoted by Giovanni Levi, “Historians, Psychoanalysis and Truth”, in A. M. Castrén, M. Lonkila et M. Peltonen (eds.), *Between Sociology and History. Essays on Microhistory, Collective Action, and Nation-Building*, 71-86. (quote on p.74)

¹⁸¹ Perry, “Finding Fatima: A Slave Woman of Early Modern Spain” in Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry, *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, 3–19.

¹⁸² Placing some documents in the archives, as well as discarding others from preservation and exposure to public view, is not a neutral operation, but one charged with political meaning. Indeed: “Archival sources available for the historian were produced at two moments: the first time as documents, and the second time as archives, i.e. as documents that are preserved, classified and cataloged”. [our translation from] « Les sources archivées dont dispose l'historien ont été fabriquées en deux temps : une première fois en tant que documents, une seconde en tant

point that challenged me to take a step back from the label of criminals attached to them, and to produce a counter-narrative. As Saidiya Hartman states in her groundbreaking book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*:

Every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor¹⁸³.

As cultural historians have shown, archives cannot be apprehended any longer as merely the mirror of the institutions that produced them¹⁸⁴. Power relations are also revealed by the composition of the penitentiary archives themselves. If we cannot know the extent of what is missing in the archives, because it was destroyed or has been hidden from public view, then we have to question the institution's intentions behind these choices. Understanding the screening process is therefore part of the historian's work¹⁸⁵. Curiously, the existing prisoners' records cover only the period prior to what Angola officials like to present as their "modern times" - offering to the historians the opportunity to describe in detail prisoners' life only during 'the middle ages' of the institution - while the administrative papers cover only the period of modernization itself (i.e. the second half of the 1950s), which followed one of the darkest moments of the institution's history and one of the darkest stains on its reputation, the so-called 'heel-slashing incident'. In February 1951, thirty-seven white male prisoners from Camp E cut their Achilles tendons with razors to protest against detention conditions and coerced labor. An investigation ensued and reforms were ordered. The official narrative is one of redemption, which contemporary penitentiary officials still adhere to¹⁸⁶. It is difficult not to discern that these operations of archival selection and preservation were an ironic reflection of the institution's actual history, a history marked by secret and hiding, by silences and denials. The Louisiana State

qu'archives, c'est-à-dire des documents conservés, classés et inventoriés. » In : Anheim et Poncet, « Fabrique des archives, fabrique de l'histoire », 3.

¹⁸³ Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, xiii.

¹⁸⁴ Pia Donato and Saada, « Introduction », in Pia Donato and Saada (eds.), *Pratiques d'archives à l'époque moderne. Europe, mondes coloniaux*, 7-22.

¹⁸⁵ Morsel, "Les sources sont-elles « le pain de l'historien » ?"

¹⁸⁶ See for instance: "Angola Brutality Reports True", *The Times-Picayune*, April 2, 1951.

Penitentiary archives, at least those accessible for research, contribute to the narrative that the institution wants to promote as much as they result from this official narrative¹⁸⁷.

In reading penitentiary and judicial archives, I was also careful to detect Black women's fear and apprehension towards the authority exercised by the legal system, which, we must remember, was an authority embodied exclusively by white men. Consequently, gender, race (and in a lot of cases, class as well), influenced Black women's behavior within the institution, as well as their words. As Ginzburg demonstrates in his work on the confessions made to officials during the Inquisition, power dynamics and emotions are an integral part of the traces that the accused left in the archives:

In order to decipher [the documents of the Inquisitors], we must learn to grasp, beneath the smooth surface of the text, the subtle interplay of threats and fears, attacks and retractions. We must learn to untangle the various threads that form the textual fabric of these dialogues¹⁸⁸.

Black studies have abundantly demonstrated that archival sources are often silent on Black lives, especially when it comes to women¹⁸⁹. Indeed, when trying to find Black women's voices in history, one comes to the realization that not only were they relegated to silence beside dominant white groups, but also beside Black men. High rates of illiteracy partially explain the scarcity of written traces bequeathed by African American women (see chapter 7 section 7.5). Many Black women's silences were extorted through violence, sexual exploitation, the threat of rape, terrorism, or domestic violence, as advanced by LaKisha Michelle Simmons, an historian of Jim Crow New Orleans: "Silence performs discursive work and has life of its own. [...] Who can speak reveals systems of power, exposing who has authority over bodies"¹⁹⁰. As Tera Hunter explains: "dominant groups have a vested interest in suppressing the knowledge produced by

¹⁸⁷ The Angola museum located at LSP also has collections that are not accessible to all researchers. Some documents also mention archives preserved at the warden's office, therefore, not accessible to the public.

¹⁸⁸ [our translation from] « Afin de déchiffrer [les documents des inquisiteurs], il nous faut apprendre à saisir, sous la surface lisse du texte, la subtile interaction des menaces et des peurs, des attaques et des rétractations. Nous devons apprendre à démêler les divers fils qui forment le tissu textuel de ces dialogues. » Ginzburg, *The Inquisitor as Anthropologist, Clues, Myths, and Historical Methods*, 160-161, quoted in: Cavazzini, « L'archive, la trace, le symptôme. Remarques sur la lecture des archives », 10.

¹⁸⁹ See for instance: Higginbotham, "Beyond The Sound of Silence"; Mitchell, "Silences Broken, Silences Kept"; LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*.

¹⁹⁰ Simmons, *Crescent City Girls*.

subordinate groups”¹⁹¹. With that in mind, it is easier to see that if Black women’s voices opposing, resisting or undermining patriarchy and white supremacy have not come to us from the past at “full volume”, it is because they were silenced to protect those systems of oppression. Therefore, part of the challenge on writing African American women’s history is to contextualize these silences and try to exhume their voices from the archives. For this project, I borrowed scholar Saidiya Hartman’s approach, which “allows for the probabilistic rendering, the ‘critical fabulation’ of experience based on the aggregation of many different sources and a preponderance of silence” although this “might emphasize the mechanisms by which humanity, subjectivity and meaningful experience are denied”¹⁹². All of this brings us to the concept of “agency”, and the limits of theorizing it when dealing with subjects who are deprived of the power to shape things in their world¹⁹³. According to Sarah Haley - who worked on Georgia convict registers to locate Black women’s experiences - archives reproduce “the social death of certain subjects through the erasure of interior desires, beliefs, sentiments, and thought pathways, relegating them to objects of torture, annotations on a ledger”, which also speaks to the obstacles my own doctoral research has faced¹⁹⁴.

As Black women’s traces are often difficult to find in archival material, especially when they themselves constitute a small percentage of the carceral population, I followed Kali Nicole Gross’s advice and adopted “a methodology that combined traditional archival research with an expansive, and at times, elastic, analytical framework” to make “the most of prison records,

¹⁹¹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 235.

¹⁹² The Middle Passage (of which very limited archives remain) is a great example of the dilemma this provokes for historians. Scholar Saidiya Hartman explains the challenges she encounters in her work researching Venus, an enslaved young African woman murdered on a slave ship before the ship arrived in America: “One cannot ask, ‘Who is Venus?’ because it would be impossible to answer such a question. There are hundreds of thousands of other girls who share her circumstances and these circumstances have generated few stories. And the stories that exist are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses, and identified them with names tossed-off as insults and crass jokes. The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore’s life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history”. Still according to Hartman, “to read the archive is to enter a mortuary”. Even if the historian takes up the challenge of looking in the archives as one would look into Emmett Till’s open casket (a metaphor used by Hartman), they would still not be able to write about actual persons, but only about how they were victimized, and maybe about how they resisted and survived this victimization. Therefore the historian retains a “sense of incompleteness” because of silences that archives cannot fill. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”, 2, 12, 15.

¹⁹³ Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 38.

¹⁹⁴ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 14.

which are often dry intake rosters, incomplete transcripts and court papers, and prison administrators' one-sided observations of inmate behaviour". One of the keys is to "read race, gender, and sexuality in critical ways - particularly how these elements are being constructed during the period of study"¹⁹⁵. As Stephanie Camp, a historian of slavery, has argued, we need to provide new interpretations of already discovered sources¹⁹⁶. With regard to my work, I crafted a methodology combining different approaches as I was gathering the data available from various sources to write "a story out of their agreements and common accounts, as well as from the insights offered by their differences"¹⁹⁷. The following section explains how I stitched together fragments of information from various sources to make sense of Black women's experiences at Angola.

2.3 Methodology

To take up the challenge of recounting African American women's experiences at Angola, I combined analysis on a macro and micro scale, and used quantitative and qualitative data gathered from a wide range of sources, as detailed above. A combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis (or mixed methods) allows for a better understanding of the subject, provides a more complete perspective on historical processes, and provides answers to different and complementary research questions¹⁹⁸. The research methods were mixed not only at the stage of the data analysis, but also beforehand, during the data collection, since, as detailed later, the first results obtained were used to determine the following data collection process. Moreover, a variation of scales of analysis, both in time and space, has the potential to breed new

¹⁹⁵ Gross, "Exploring Crime and Violence in Early-Twentieth-Century Black Women's History" in Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry, *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, 57.

¹⁹⁶ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 13.

¹⁹⁷ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 8.

¹⁹⁸ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*.

interpretations, as micro-historians have argued¹⁹⁹. It allows for “the inclusion of the multi-layered texture of society”²⁰⁰. According to French historian Jacques Revel, individuals’ experiences can be understood as tied to different spatial and time contexts:

each historical actor participates, in a near or distant way, in processes - and therefore is part of contexts - of varying dimensions and levels, from the most local to the most global. [...] What the experience of an individual, of a group, of a space allows us to grasp is a particular modulation of the global history. Particular and original because what the micro-historical point of view offers to observation, it is not an attenuated, or partial, or mutilated version of macro-social realities: it is [...] a different version²⁰¹.

My approach to sources is also inspired by Simmons, who uses what Paula Fass calls a “disciplined imagination” carefully detailing to her readership her empirical method and the conclusions that she draws from her multiple sources²⁰². Simmons’ approach could be compared to Childs’ “act of counter-historical imagination” when dealing with the ‘traces’ left behind by two Angola prisoners²⁰³. LeFlouria also uses her “disciplined imagination” when writing about incarcerated women’s trauma²⁰⁴. A deep empathy towards the studied subjects of history seems to serve as an anchor for these works, and it is also the way I envision my own. Using the sources and their inherent incompleteness, and drawing from other research conducted in similar contexts, my ambition with this dissertation is to tell a plausible history of African American women’s experiences at Angola and beyond, which would mean that ‘maybes’ and ‘one may believe’ are an integral part of the history I am writing, even at some moments resorting to an informed exercise of imagination to fill the gaps²⁰⁵.

¹⁹⁹ Trivellato, “Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory”, 122.

²⁰⁰ [our translation from] « la prise en compte de la structure feuilletée du social » in: Revel, *Jeux d’échelles*, 26.

²⁰¹ [our translation from] « [...] chaque acteur historique participe, de façon proche ou lointaine, à des processus - et donc s'inscrit dans des contextes - de dimensions et de niveaux variables, du plus local au plus global. [...] Ce que l'expérience d'un individu, d'un groupe, d'un espace permet de saisir, c'est une modulation particulière de l'histoire globale. Particulière et originale car ce que le point de vue micro-historique offre à l'observation, ce n'est pas une version atténuée, ou partielle, ou mutilée de réalités macro-sociales : c'en est [...] une version différente. » in: Revel, *Jeux d’échelles*, 26.

²⁰² Simmons, *Crescent City Girls*; Fass, “Cultural History/Social History.”

²⁰³ Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 109. I use ‘traces’ in reference to Carlo Ginzburg’s micro-history method. See for instance: Ginzburg, « Signes, traces, pistes. Racines d’un paradigme de l’indice ».

²⁰⁴ LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*.

²⁰⁵ Zemon Davis quoted by Ginzburg, *Le fil et les traces. Vrai, faux, fictif*, 446.

2.3.1 Design and purposes of the Angola Women's Database (1901-1935)

One of my research objectives was to establish a sociodemographic portrait of the African American female population at Angola over the period of my study. This portrait, presented in its outlines in chapter 3 and in more detail over the remaining chapters, relies mainly on the Angola women's database I designed specifically for this dissertation (see Appendix A for the list of variables). The database consists of information from LSP registers of admissions (1901-1925) and convict records (1901-1935) (see section 2.1 for a detailed description of these two series of sources). Unfortunately, the penitentiary archives being incomplete, the portrait I was able to draw from these sources covers only the period 1901 to 1935, i.e. a little more than half of the studied period. The LSP records offer over fifty categories of information about individuals, all of which I examined as material for quantitative and qualitative analysis, not only on the sociodemographics of the women carceral population at Angola, but also on sentencing and incarceration practices (see chapter 6), and on prison labor (see chapter 7).

Admissions to the penitentiary constitute the main window for data collection from the LSP registers. I have failed to locate instructions on the admission procedures or information on their authorship, the context of the production of the registers or their intended use. Considering that a significant portion of the men and women arriving at the penitentiary receiving station were illiterate and considering the power imbalance inherent to the situation, it is more than likely that the clerk might have assumed certain information (for instance the race of the person) rather than asking the individuals themselves. Because of the subaltern position occupied by the newly admitted prisoners, it is likely that they incurred what feminist philosopher Miranda Fricker calls "testimonial injustice", i.e. a deficit of credibility in the eyes of the clerk, originating from gender, race, class, and - for lack of a better term - respectability bias²⁰⁶. Admission records

²⁰⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.

provide only a partial representation of the interaction between the penitentiary administration and the newly arrived prisoner²⁰⁷. Therefore, it is important to consider the context in which they were produced. For instance, admission is usually the moment when rules are told to the newly admitted, and first impressions are produced both ways. Both the institution and the new prisoner might want to project a strong image, disclosing some information while hiding some other.

Moreover, the admissions registers and similar records represent only a portion of the documents produced by the penitentiary administration over the period - the portion that was preserved and made available to public view. These registers are one link in a chain of records produced by the criminal justice system (including local police forces, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), criminal courts and places of incarceration, such as other state penitentiaries or parish jails)²⁰⁸. Finally, collecting and recording the information on prisoners also depended on “the capacity and willingness of prison officers on the ground [...] to undertake with rigour these sorts of routine bureaucratic tasks that are the foundation of our current analyses”²⁰⁹. Indeed, the accuracy of the data recorded in the penitentiary admission registers and prisoner records is a concern, since there is no other source to cross-reference with penitentiary records except U.S. censuses conducted every ten years, and that only cover a small portion of the whole set of data points (for instance age, place of birth).

It is plausible to assume that these documents, once created, served a wide range of internal objectives in the management of the prisoners, such as keeping track of the individuals in custody and rapidly determining their discharge date; they were also presumably used in interactions

²⁰⁷ Ethan Blue argues that even when the clerk assigned to the admission procedures was himself a prisoner (usually a white male), he embodied penitentiary authority and values. See: Blue, *Doing Time in the Depression*, chap. 1.

²⁰⁸ It seems likely that penitentiary admission clerks used other pre-existing documents to fill out the register, and, in the process, reproduced data (and mistakes) from previous records concerning the person (for instance, information on the trial reproduced in the B series, such as the name of the judge, the judicial district and the date of conviction). The parish Sheriff who was in charge of transporting the person from the court, or from the parish jail after their conviction, probably passed on the data the parish court recorded on the individual during legal procedures to the penitentiary receiving station during the transfer. There is no guarantee that the penitentiary staff did not merely copy information recorded and handed down by the law enforcement agencies (an indication for this is that some records bear the mention “see police record” or “no police record” and some even mention a FBI file number).

²⁰⁹ Fyson and Fenchel, “Prison Registers, Their Possibilities and Their Pitfalls: The Case of Local Prisons in Nineteenth-Century Quebec”, 185.

between the penitentiary administration and the outside world²¹⁰. The B series registers were also likely to be used to produce the warden's recommendations to the parole or pardon board, since they give details on punishments and "good time" throughout incarceration. This is corroborated by the presence of excerpts from convict records in the pardon records I also examined.

To constitute the inventory of women, I went systematically through LSP admission registers and convict records, listed all the women prisoners and transcribed all the information contained in the ledgers relative to these women (see table 2.4). From pardon records, I found an additional 234 women's names. The inventory totals 1,636 women either present on January 1, 1901, when the State took over the penitentiary management (37 women), or admitted between 1901 and 1961. Many entries did not present complete information, and therefore the Angola Women's Database was narrowed down to the women admitted from January 1, 1901 to December 31, 1935, thereby providing detailed information for 1,056 women. Duplicate entries, i.e. if a person was mentioned in more than one register for the same admission, were consolidated into the database. Data integrity tests were run on the 19 women who appear more than twice in the registers over the period 1901-1935 because they served several terms at LSP. The coherence of the data recorded for the same person on multiple incarcerations across several years or decades indicated that the information such as age, or height in the prison registers is accurate. The remaining segments of the inventory (1900, and after 1935) could not be used to produce statistics, but were useful to retrieve court documents as well as newspaper clippings concerning individual cases and serve to discussions in the following chapters.

²¹⁰ For instance, the 'Convict Records' part of the B series registers contain addresses for relatives or friends, for emergency cases, such as the prisoner's death. Volume 21 contains several entries mentioning that the prisoner's "remains" were "claimed by a relative". Source: Death Report, Volume 21, 1928-1948, LSP Collection.

Table 2.4: Number of female individuals inventoried in LSP records

	Period covered	White women	African American women	Total number of women
LSP Admission Registers - Series A (volumes 10, 11, 17, 18, 19)	1900-1925	46	621	667
LSP Receiving Station Register (volume 12) without duplicate entries	1934-1941	30	274	304
LSP Convict records - Series B (volumes 23-42) without duplicate entries	1902-1935	48	383	431
Total penitentiary records without duplicate entries	1900-1941	124	1278	1,402
Pardon records	1941-1961	Not available	Not available	234
Total without duplicate entries	1900-1961			1,636
Angola Women's Database	1901-1935	93	963	1,056

Sources: LSP Collection; Collection P1975-021, Pardons 1892-1940; Collection P1994-017, Pardons 1944-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

Below, I provide some methodological remarks on the main data points covered in the records and constituting the sociodemographic variables of my database: gender, race, birthplace, marital status, literacy, and occupation before incarceration, as well as biometrics variables: height, weight, shoe size and other information extracted and used to discuss health issues.

In convict records (B-series), the women admitted received systematically the mention ‘female’ in the record, which was not the case of earlier admission registers (A-series), although in some

of them, the mention 'female' appeared besides the name of the prisoner (mainly after 1907). Similarly, women were not mentioned in annual or biennial reports produced by the penitentiary officials, except for their total numbers "at hands" or among new arrivals. To determine the gender of a person, I relied on their first name or in some cases their occupation before incarceration (for instance "house girl"). I cross-referenced this with newspaper clippings or census records when available to determine the individual's gender for uncertain cases, but I had to resort to arbitrary decisions to include in or exclude from my database some of the names. Unlike Black women, white women were most often described as 'Mrs.' adjoining their husband's name, revealing a racial hierarchy present in the penitentiary from the very moment of their admission. However, this detail in the registers made white women's identification easier for the purpose of the database.

As regard to race, it is systematically mentioned in the convict records (B series) but not in the admission registers (A series), although in the latter, it can be deduced from the record of the 'complexion', for which categories are often imposed on people (for instance, a person of Filipino origin was classified as a "Japanese" type). A careful observation of the handwritten penitentiary registers reveals a succession of anonymous authors, a succession that creates variations in the characterization of the 'complexion' of the newly admitted women, revealing the authors' subjectivity within, despite the dryness of the administrative sources. Successive clerks used a variety of terms to describe African Americans' complexion that were not necessarily used by African Americans for themselves. African Americans' complexion was mostly described as: 'black', 'light black', or 'dark black', but also according to various shades pointing in the direction of individuals with both African and Caucasian origins (but who were always treated as Blacks in the penitentiary): 'griff', 'light griff', 'dark griff', 'yellow', 'mulatto', 'octoroon', or 'quadroon'. Historian James Gill quotes a 1910 Louisiana State Supreme Court decision that reflects the complexity of the construction of race in Louisiana rather than clarifying the matter:

We do not think there could be any serious denial of the fact that in Louisiana the words 'mulatto', 'quadroon', and 'octoroon' are of as definite meaning as the word 'man' or 'child'. There is also the less widely known word 'griff', which, in this state, has a definite meaning, indicating the issue of a negro and a mulatto. The person too black to be a mulatto and too pale in color to be a negro is a griff. The person too dark to be a white, and too bright to be a griff, is a mulatto. Between these different shades, we do not believe there is much, if any, difficulty in distinguishing. Nor can there be, we think, any serious denial of the fact that in Louisiana, and indeed, throughout the United States (except on the Pacific

slope), the word ‘colored’, when applied to race, has the definite and well-known meaning of a person having negro blood in his veins. We think also that any candid mind must admit that the word ‘negro’ of itself, unqualified, does not necessarily include within its meaning persons possessed of only an admixture of negro blood; notably those whose admixture is so slight that in their case even an expert cannot be positive²¹¹.

Considering the list of terms used by the admission clerks at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, it seems that the statement “*Between these different shades, we do not believe there is much, if any, difficulty in distinguishing*” does not hold water beyond the courtroom. The U.S. population census classified people of mixed African and European descent as ‘mulattos’, ‘quadroons’, ‘octoroons’ until the one-drop-rule was integrated: for the 1930 census, all people of African descent, even mixed-race, were labeled Black (in this research, the term ‘mixed-race’ is favored)²¹². While mixed-race women shared genetic traits from both African and European origins, they had lower socioeconomic status than whites, and they are grouped here with Black women, as penitentiary officials considered them Black²¹³. Interestingly, whites’ complexions are also described in a variety of ways, which give an indication of Louisiana natives’ attitudes towards people of immigrant descent, especially Italians, often described as of ‘dark’ complexion, or ‘swarthy’ (in opposition to other whites whose complexions are described as ‘fair’). White women were included in the database to make comparisons possible with the studied group, and to assess the ratio between the two groups. I argue later in this dissertation that this grossly disproportionate ratio was a key component of life at the women’s camp. White women were sometimes only a few individuals at Angola. They were incarcerated in the same quarters, although housed in different dormitories than African American women (see chapter 5 section 5.2).

Turning now to the variable of age, data suggests that age distribution does not show high peaks for ages such as 20, 25, 30, etc. suggesting that there was no age heaping in the penitentiary

²¹¹ Quoted in Gill, *Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans*, 170.

²¹² Schor, *Compter et classer : Histoire des recensements américains*.

²¹³ Jim Crow laws crushed Louisiana’s three-caste system prevailing in the antebellum period when Creoles of color enjoyed a privileged status over other African Americans. With the adoption of the one-drop rule, a Southerner’s racial identity was necessarily either Black or white. Penitentiary records render visible this major societal change. For more on the subject, see : Dominguez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* ; Lachance, “The Formation of a Three-Caste Society: Evidence from Wills in Antebellum New Orleans” ; Kein, *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*.

records, whether from self-reported ages or from estimates made by the admission officials²¹⁴. In order to allow comparisons with other data available produced by Christina Pruett Hermann in her recent dissertation, I used the same age groups as she did (12-15, 16-21, 22-30, 31-40, 41-54 and over 55 years old)²¹⁵. For the purpose of analysis, I also sometimes resorted to birth cohorts that I deduced from the person's age at time of admission. Most of the women in the database are adults, since Louisiana introduced in 1908 a separate juvenile court²¹⁶. However, most juvenile institutions in Louisiana were not designed to receive African American girls, so some of them were sent to the state penitentiary. Their cases were given special attention in this dissertation. The prisoner's birthplace, as well as their fathers' and mothers', are variables filled out in the registers indicating the state or (when appropriate) the foreign country. The following categories were used: Louisiana, other southern states, other states, Italy (because it was the foreign country most represented among white women), other foreign countries. These data points are pertinent to analyse in the context of important migration and immigration waves and useful to discuss patterns of mobility over generations. Interestingly, a note from the LSP General Manager addressed in 1934 to the Receiving Station's Captain states that:

If the prisoner gives the place of his nativity as any country or location outside of the United States, ask him the following questions, and note the replies on the margin of the description sheet: Of what country are you now a citizen? When and where did you last enter the United States²¹⁷?

This suggests that the state of Louisiana had an increased concern over foreign descent in the period after the Great Depression. The parish of conviction is also a data point for the database, and throughout the dissertation, several variables are presented according to the main parishes where women were convicted.

²¹⁴ People who are less literate will tend to report ages rounded to the nearest decade. Horrell, Meredith, and Oxley, "Measuring Misery: Body Mass, Ageing and Gender Inequality in Victorian London", *Explorations in Economic History*, 46, 93–119. Quoted by Fyson and Fenchel, "Prison Registers, Their Possibilities and Their Pitfalls: The Case of Local Prisons in Nineteenth-Century Quebec", 179.

²¹⁵ Designed specifically for her dissertation, Hermann's *Louisiana State Penitentiary Prisoner Database* (LSPPD) contains matriculation data from 5,221 prisoners confined to Angola who were received at the penitentiary during the five following years: 1927, 1929, 1931, 1933, and 1935. Hermann, "Specters of Freedom".

²¹⁶ Louisiana established separate laws and courts for juveniles by the Act 199 (1908), which served as an amendment of Act 70 (1900).

²¹⁷ R.L. Himes to Captain, 24 March 1934, Receiving Station Register Quarters F, Volume 12, 1934-1941, LSP Collection.

With the expansion of local, state and federal government at the turn of the 20th century, the use of standardized forms containing questions became more widespread. For instance, variables concerning the education of prisoners, their marital status and their occupation before incarceration were part of the intake procedures (see chapter 7). It is worth mentioning that they represent very elementary categories. For instance, the data relative to literacy is often limited to a yes or no answer, limiting our knowledge to the simple dichotomy of literate / illiterate which makes it problematic to use as a reliable measure of popular-class literacy²¹⁸. The ‘ability to read’ and the ‘ability to write’ are separate data points before 1925 and a single data point afterwards. Those who could ‘read and write’ may therefore comprise some who were fully literate, and some who were only partially literate. To be able to treat these data and make comparisons throughout the period 1901-1935, I coded the ‘ability to read’ (0,1) and the ‘ability to write’ (0,1) to calculate a literacy score (0,1,2). Between 1901 and 1912, the ‘education’ data point is not available for everybody, while from 1912 to 1934, ‘education’ is briefly characterized as either ‘none’, ‘poor’, ‘fair’ or ‘good,’ although sometimes described as ‘little’ or ‘common’ or with a number of years which probably corresponds to school attendance. Because of these brief characterizations and the probable shifts in meanings of the categories as interpreted by successive members of the admission staff and in the instructions given to them, I decided not to use the ‘education’ data point in the statistical portrait²¹⁹. Penitentiary officials did not demonstrate interest in prisoners’ skills other than manual. Indeed, they did not offer Angola prisoners a literacy program until the introduction in the late 1950s of the Dr. Frank C. Laubach’s method of teaching persons to read and write (with the exception of a one-year WPA project during the Great Depression)²²⁰.

²¹⁸ Crone, “Reappraising Victorian literacy through prison records”, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 15, 2010, 3-37. Quoted by Fyson and Fenchel, “Prison Registers, Their Possibilities and Their Pitfalls : The Case of Local Prisons in Nineteenth-Century Quebec”, 174.

²¹⁹ In the 1940s, it was stated that: “The usual custom is about as follows: If the prisoner can read and write, the notation is “poor”. If he has had up to, say, a fifth grade education, the notation is “fair”, and if a grade school education he is listed as “good”. Where this practice originated seems to have been lost in antiquity at the prison. It is a simple matter for the prisoner to boost his own standing by falsifying his educational standard – many have done so – and no other educational probing is given him during his entire stay.” Source: Proposal for a Survey at Angola, undated (1944?), Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.1, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

²²⁰ Hearings conducted by the Advisory Committee to the Department of Institutions, Sub-Committee on Penal Institutions, February 1944, Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.6, Department of Institutions Advisory Committee, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection,

As I will discuss in chapter 7, the labor performed in the penitentiary by the incarcerated was manual for the most part. Likewise, the occupations African American women had before incarceration were mostly manual. Often limited to a simple categorization (for instance: “laborer”, “house work”), the occupations listed in admission records reflect the limited perspectives open to Black workers. It also reflects the prejudices of the person who is in charge of the information intake: Black persons are seen as providers of physical force (to be used as “field hands”, for levee work, for housework tasks) while white persons are seen as bringing skills to the penitentiary (ex: railroad workers, blacksmiths, etc.). However, this categorization does not necessarily reflect the variety of their tasks or work situations, or the range of their skills. Over the period 1901-1935, admission staff recorded a hundred different occupations for women before their incarceration, which I coded in the database into fourteen categories: washwoman, seamstress, laborer, farm work, house work, cook, housewife, housekeeper, school teacher, nurse, clerical work, restaurant work, no occupation, other. The usual skilled / unskilled occupation categories were discarded here because of the over-representation of women in what are usually referred as unskilled occupations.

Not much information was recorded on the prisoners’ personal lives. The prison registers recorded the marital status of individuals along simple categories (single, married, divorced, widowed), which were too short to reflect the full range of living situations experienced. These categories can also be misleading. For instance, a woman who had allegedly killed her male partner could be listed either as “widow” or “married”. Prison ledgers do not give any direct information on the nature of individuals’ families, for example the number of dependent children that a woman might have. Among U.S. censuses available for the period of my study, only the 1910 census recorded information on families: the number of years of present marriage, the number of children born, as well as the number of children living at the time of the census, information pertinent to draw a portrait of the subjects of this dissertation. Unfortunately, admission records from the 1950s are not available for research; however, the penitentiary reports

Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans. (Hereafter 1944 Hearings) See pages 158-161. On the Laubach method, see: Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1958-1959, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC; folder 3 “Inmate Educational Program 1957”, Collection P1981-497, LSP Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

available for the period present statistics on the home background, which makes sense in the context of the growing influence of social work. This information was likely to be used by parole boards or in examining pardon applications, and contributed to the persistence of racial prejudices against Black families and Black motherhood, an issue that will be discussed further in this research (see chapter 8).

Finally, a last data point will be used in this project to document the sociodemographic portrait of the carceral female population: their religion (see chapter 7). Some Convict Records (B series) present information on the incarcerated women's religious affiliation, suggesting that the registers could also be used by the penitentiary chaplains. Before it is systematically typed on every person's file (starting only in 1932), the mention appears in pencil only on the files of female prisoners who received either a life sentence or a very long sentence; this might indicate that the chaplains were more interested in working with these prisoners. Although this seems to contradict the rehabilitation objective that successive chaplains mentioned in their various reports to the state of Louisiana, it could also be that their lack of human resources led them to focus on individuals who committed more serious crimes rather than on alleged thieves, who were often "repeat offenders" whose souls the chaplains might have considered harder to save, or whose souls were in less immediate mortal peril.

Apart from sociodemographic data such as age, marital status or occupation before incarceration, the records contain biometric data such as height (recorded at quarter-inch increments) and weight, which can be taken into account for a biometric analysis of the studied group (see chapter 8). For every individual in the database, the variables of height, weight and shoe size were double-checked (I compared the transcript to the original data set in a second run through). Borrowing the methods of anthropometric historians, I propose in this dissertation to examine biometric data to document African American women's pre-incarceration health conditions. White women were excluded from this biometric analysis because there were only ninety-three observations in the database. Of course, since only a fraction of the Black female population was sentenced to the penitentiary, this data should be read with caution. Adult stature is indicative of life conditions at youth. It is widely admitted that depriving individuals of proper nutrition in

their earlier years typically results in their being shorter than otherwise in adulthood²²¹. More than food deprivation, the study of stature can inform us about a range of environmental factors affecting human development:

Stature measures the net effect of nutrition, environmental conditions, disease, insults, and calorie claims for work; consequently, environment can influence a population's average stature. When diets, health, or physical environments improve, the average stature increases, but it decreases when diets become less nutritious, when disease environments deteriorate, or when the physical environment places more stress on the body. Hence stature provides significant insights into the understanding of historical processes²²².

As established in previous anthropometric studies, youth stature corresponds to the immediate effects of privation. Because of this, stature is considered here for youths and adults separately. For this project, the following categorization was adopted: I considered as adults everyone over the age of 22, when I assumed that final height was reached, a factor often assumed to be the case for historical populations and particularly those of lower socioeconomic status. Below the age of 22, I reported stature for each age separately²²³.

Height records appeared in the U.S. in the early 18th century in military records and weight records around the middle of the 19th century, but otherwise remained rare except for prison populations²²⁴. Systematic height and weight records on other large population groups were not produced in the U.S. before the mid-20th century. Prison and military records are therefore the most common sources used by historians to document height and weight, because they provide stature measurements on large groups of individuals. Because of minimum stature requirements

²²¹ Inwood and Maxwell-Stewart, "Introduction: Health, Human Capital, and Early Economic Development in Australia and New Zealand."

²²² Carson, "Health during Industrialization", 348.

²²³ Carson, "Health during Industrialization", 356. According to Inwood and Evans: "Between birth and the early twenties a human body has the capability to grow in stature. The most rapid periods of growth are from birth to 3 years, and in early adolescence. Males normally continue growing for longer than females, so that in well-nourished populations without significant gender inequality males are, on average, 11.5–12.5 cm taller than females. Three-quarters of the gender difference arises because boys grow for 2 more years at pre-adolescent rates (i.e. their growth spurt is delayed); boys also have a slightly larger growth spurt (higher amplitude and modestly greater length)". Inwood and Roberts, "Longitudinal Studies of Human Growth and Health: A Review of Recent Historical Research", 803.

²²⁴ Komlos and Carson, "The BMI Values of the Lower Classes Likely Declined during the Great Depression."

to enlist in military forces, samples from prison records are preferable as ways of documenting stature²²⁵. According to John Komlos and Scott Carson, two leading historians in the field:

From these records one can form a broad outline of the trends and levels of the weight of historical populations, mostly pertaining to men in as much as women were generally not found in those institutions in large-enough numbers at the time for reliable statistical analysis²²⁶.

In another article dedicated to the study of Texas prison population, Carson expands on the pertinence of using prison records to document economic conditions: “while prison records are not random samples, the selectivity they represent have some advantages, such as being drawn from lower socioeconomic groups, i.e., those who were most vulnerable to economic change”²²⁷. In chapter 8, I propose to use the Angola Women’s Database to document African American women’s stature, and I also used recorded height and weight to produce data on the Body Mass Index (BMI), which is not only a measure of health (as “BMI values have been linked to health outcomes as overweight and obese individuals are more likely to experience diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and stroke”) but also an indication of economic conditions²²⁸. Indeed, for historical periods “when traditional measures for economic welfare are scarce or unreliable, stature and the body mass index (BMI) are now widely-used measures that reflect economic conditions”²²⁹. Comparisons with other groups at Angola or with the general population are not possible because of the lack of sources, and the data produced thanks to the Angola women’s database cannot be extrapolated to the African American population outside because prison data contain generally disproportionate numbers of economically disadvantaged individuals, whose stature might be lower than the general population²³⁰.

Except for weight and height, physical descriptions recorded in LSP registers comprise no anthropometric data, despite the popularity of the Cesare Lombroso’s theories at the turn of the

²²⁵ Carson, “Health during Industrialization”, 355.

²²⁶ Komlos and Carson, “The BMI Values of the Lower Classes Likely Declined during the Great Depression”, 137.

²²⁷ Carson, “Racial Differences in Body Mass Indices of Men Imprisoned in 19th Century Texas”, 122.

²²⁸ Carson, “Racial Differences in Body Mass Indices of Men Imprisoned in 19th Century Texas”, 124.

²²⁹ Carson, “Black and White Female Body Mass Index Values in the Developing Late 19th and Early 20th Century United States”, 309.

²³⁰ Riggs, “The Standard of Living in Scotland, 1800–1850”, in: Komlos (Ed.), *Stature, Living Standards and Economic Development: Essays in Anthropometric History*.

20th century. We also know that Bertillon's techniques were in use in Louisiana, at least in New Orleans following the creation of the NOPD Bureau of Identification in 1896, but it seems that they might only have been used by police forces selectively to track "suspicious persons" as the number of cards produced was largely inferior to arrest numbers. These cards were both added to the local collection and sent to the FBI²³¹. At some point during the period, pictures of the newcomers were more than likely taken at the penitentiary, although sources contradict themselves on the matter²³². A 1940 article from the Angola newspaper, *The Argus*, states that systematic photographs of individuals newly admitted at Angola started only in 1928²³³, whereas the warden stated as early as 1909 that "He [the new prisoner] is also photographed, the negative being carefully preserved, and a copy of the photograph, together with all the records relating to him, filed in the office"²³⁴. Moreover, Roger Benton, a former white male prisoner at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, stated in his memoir that, during his incarceration in 1919-1920, he was photographer at "the Walls" in Baton Rouge, producing mugshots²³⁵. Unfortunately, the archives do not contain any of these photographs, preventing us from having any certainty on the matter.

Biomedical information such as health condition, medical treatment or disease, does not appear in the penitentiary admission records, contrary to other U.S. penitentiaries of the same period whose admission records contain intake on drink or drug habits, or details on the medical history²³⁶. Therefore, my discussion of health issues is limited, compared to other studies made in similar settings²³⁷. LSP records contain information on the use of tobacco among prisoners. Was it to

²³¹ Annual Report of Board of Police Commissioners and the Superintendent of Police of the City of New Orleans for the Year 1899, Call number TP-200, City Archives, New Orleans City Library.

²³² Several 1938 entries contain the mention: "photo" juxtaposed with a date. Receiving Station Register Quarters F, Volume 12, 1934-1941, LSP Collection.

²³³ "Facts Like Fiction: Old Angola Archives Expose Musty Records of Bygone Days", *Angola Argus*, Volume 1, no.5, December 25, 1940.

²³⁴ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1908-1909, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 67.

²³⁵ Benton and Ballou, *Where Do I Go from Here?*, 116–17. Unfortunately, his admission was not located in the LSP records. Roger Benton might be a pseudonym.

²³⁶ See for instance: Charleroy, "Penitentiary Practice: Healthcare and Medicine in Minnesota State Prison, 1855-1930."

²³⁷ Inwood, Oxley, and Roberts, "Physical Growth and Ethnic Inequality in New Zealand Prisons, 1840–1975."

estimate the consumption of tobacco and therefore to assess the institution's need to either produce or buy? The 1901 annual report states that 9,290 pounds of tobacco were consumed during the year 1901²³⁸. A few decades later, 9,472 pounds of chewing tobacco and 51,101 bags of smoking tobacco were processed at the tobacco factory where Black female prisoners worked (see chapter 7)²³⁹.

Interestingly, LSP registers contain information on teeth, wounds, scars and other marks on the person's body, which led me to discuss the prisoners' physical condition at the time of their admission to the penitentiary (see chapter 8). Detailed physical descriptions, included gold-filled teeth and tattoos, were probably recorded on admission as a means to control the carceral population. However, this information proved useful in learning more about these women's lives as tattoos were "self-inscribed pictorial narratives [...] women kept on their own bodies"²⁴⁰. Historians have also used prisoners' tattoos to interpret prison culture²⁴¹. I coded these physical descriptions in different categories to be able to run quantitative analysis as well as to identify special cases to discuss qualitatively: cut scars and burn scars, handicapped, mutilated or heavily scarred, gun and stab wounds. I also identified cases where sexualized, racist or derogatory comments leached into the descriptions, which suggest how the admission clerks treated women when they first entered the penitentiary. The physical descriptions accompanying every entry in series A and B could have very well been used when prisoners attempted to escape, to be able to recognize them when spotted on prison grounds, to distribute a fugitive warrant to outside police forces, or even to publish in the newspapers. Some other penitentiaries produced 'fugitive cards' in the same period but none was found in the LSP archives²⁴². A mention in one of the penitentiary reports to the legislature confirms the various uses for detailed descriptions:

²³⁸ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 56.

²³⁹ Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1943-1944, State of Louisiana, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1944, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC. Information on page 84.

²⁴⁰ Williams and Godfrey, *Criminal Women 1850-1920: Researching the Lives of Britain's Female Offenders*, 185.

²⁴¹ Artières and Lacassagne, *À fleur de peau: médecins, tatouages et tatoués : 1880-1910*; Tepperman, "Marked Men: Masculinity, Mobility, and Convict Tattoos, 1919-1940."

²⁴² For instance Folsom prison (California) used escape cards. A specimen can be found in the collections of the Johnny Cash Museum, Nashville, Tennessee.

At present the [dental] Department has an Examination Card on each and every inmate confined. Each new inmate is examined completely by this Department and from the very beginning of his stay at this institution his Dental Health is regulated. These cards are not only valuable from the standpoint of a positive check on an inmate's current dental condition, but also serve as a valuable source of identification information in the event of death or escape of the inmate²⁴³.

This use of admission records for rapid identification in the relatively rare cases of escape is also suggested by the fact that the men and women's physical descriptions resemble the ads for runaway slaves published by slaveowners during the antebellum period²⁴⁴. Interestingly, I noticed through a visual examination of the records that the women's descriptions are on average shorter than the men's. This could be because the penitentiary officials did not need to differentiate them as much due to their limited numbers among the carceral population. Pregnancy was also indicated in admission registers in the category 'marks on person'. It seems from the very small number of mentions in the penitentiary records (a total of 3 over the period 1901-1941), that whether a woman was pregnant was not systematically recorded. Because pregnancies were only self-diagnosed, they might have remained undetected during the first trimester²⁴⁵. Another plausible explanation is that women preferred to hide this information during their admission. I will discuss this matter in greater length in chapter 8. Sociodemographic statistics on the Black female carceral population presented in this dissertation include recidivists (i.e. individuals who were admitted more than once at Angola), as well as individuals who escaped (whether they were recaptured and they completed their sentence or not), and those who died in custody. These particular cases were not always included in statistics regarding sentences presented in chapter 6. Special attention was given to escape cases or escape attempts in the discussion on resistance (see chapter 5). I also pay particular attention to people who died in custody, whether it was allegedly from suicide, accident, disease, or other causes, and have incorporated in the database the information contained in the unique volume of 'Death Report' when available (see chapter 5)²⁴⁶.

²⁴³ Louisiana Department of Institutions, Biennial Report July 1, 1948- June 30, 1950, Call number HV8338 A2, LLMVC. Dental report on page 3-E.

²⁴⁴ See *Freedom on the Move* project: <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/> Accessed February 12, 2021.

²⁴⁵ Carson, "Black and White Female Body Mass Index Values in the Developing Late 19th and Early 20th Century United States", 312.

²⁴⁶ Death Report, Volume 21, 1928-1948, LSP Collection.

The database contains information on sentence lengths that had to be coded to make it intelligible. Because of successive legislative changes, penal reforms, as well as political orientations towards what society deemed the “criminal class”, sentences underwent several major transformations throughout the period. In the late 19th century, “Good Time” laws were adopted making it possible for the incarcerated to have their sentences reduced from those received at conviction (under certain conditions that will be discussed in chapter 6), and these laws were further amended in the 20th century. In the 1910s, courts introduced indeterminate sentencing, and parole (and later reprieves) became a new favored method to maintain control over different individuals without locking them up. In addition, state governors used their power to grant commutations and pardons. Finally, the possibility of furlough was introduced for some individuals, for periods lasting from a few days to a few months. In short, it is impossible to determine from the judicial sentence an individual originally received in court how they long actually stayed at Angola. Convictions were analysed, but I paid particular attention to the actual sentence from ‘admission’ to ‘discharge’, and in cases of parole or reprieve, I examined all the periods of post-release state supervision until their ‘final discharge’. The notion of ‘good time’ was analysed to highlight its mechanisms and its relationships with the observance or contestation of prison discipline.

The examination of pardon records has enabled me to get a better perspective on the execution of sentences. Unfortunately, no parole records were found in the archives other than pencil marks on the flip side of Convict Records, showing the obligation of paroled individuals to report at regular intervals to the warden, a sheriff or some other state official, and the occasional parole violation bringing the individual back to the penitentiary. Intervals between conviction and discharge (resulting in the actual sentence) were calculated and analysed. All durations were calculated in number of days. For the purpose of statistical analysis, every life sentence and every death sentence appearing in the registers were coded as 100 years (or 1,200 months, or 36,000 days) because this is a period of time exceeding any other sentence. It also serves as a clear nominal label while all other sentences are ordinal²⁴⁷.

²⁴⁷ An alternative would have been to use life expectancy numbers to give an ordinal measure to a life or death sentence.

To be able to make comparisons with the entire Angola population, I used the same categorization as Hermann in coding the offenses for the purpose of my own database, i.e. crimes against property, crimes against persons (including rape), crimes against persons & property (including robbery), crimes against public morality (including abortion, concubinage and prostitution) and other crimes (including narcotics). Property crimes were labelled in a number of ways depending on what was taken, its value, and from where and when it was taken: larceny, simple larceny, breaking and entering in daytime, breaking and entering at night, to name only a few. They essentially consisted of acquiring money or items that did not belong to the accused, and the variety of offenses reflect the variety of circumstances or methods employed (an information that the court records can sometimes provide).

When transcribing the penitentiary records, I also noticed that several women were not admitted to the penitentiary immediately after their conviction. I created different categories and coded this time interval between conviction and admission dates. For every case that indicated 50 days and over between the two dates, I went through Supreme Court Reported cases, as it appeared that a majority of the “delayed admissions” were indeed related to cases of appeals, which I was able to locate subsequently in archives. Orleans parish stands as an exception in that there were a few cases with a delayed admission to the penitentiary without indication of an appeal; a plausible explanation might be that convicted persons had to pay a fine for court fees, and they did so by ‘doing time’ at the parish jail before their transfer to LSP.

New statistical information is presented in this dissertation, which results from the database built with raw data extracted from the ‘admission’ registers and ‘Convict Records’. As mentioned earlier, the admission records likely served different purposes, one of them being to make it possible for administrators to provide statistical information for their reports to the Louisiana legislature at a time when scientific penology was increasingly influential. I also examined the penitentiary reports and used the statistical information they offer to trace the evolution of the sociodemographics of the penitentiary throughout the period and to make comparisons between the white and Black female population and the carceral population at Angola as a whole (see chapter 3). Interestingly, statistics such as the data contained in annual or biennial reports do not vary much from one report to another. Annual or biennial reports all present statistics on new

admissions such as crime, geographical provenance, or occupation of the newly admitted individuals before their incarceration. Data related to gender, race, age at conviction, crime committed, literacy, occupation before incarceration, and place of birth are usually available in these official reports. However, they do not provide data sufficiently broken down to be able to cross-examine gender and race with other variables. Other variables such as marital status, education or age (except for minors who are reported in some reports) are not used although they are part of the data entry. The tables are not commented in the annual and biennial reports, and do not seem to lead to any sort of conclusions in the reports themselves. The most important figure presented in the penitentiary reports relative to the carceral population seems to be the aggregate number of persons incarcerated, which is actually not derived from admission registers. This figure describing the overall population held at LSP was used mostly as a justification to request the allocation of funds by the legislature to the penitentiary, on the ground that there had been a significant and almost steady growth of the carceral population since the opening date of the LSP. Mentions of the challenge of overcrowded conditions recurred frequently in the narrative proposed in the annual and biennial penitentiary reports.

The quantitative data available on African American women incarcerated at Angola is in fact very limited in the reports. Therefore, I used the penitentiary reports and other statistical information mostly to describe the carceral population as a whole, and whenever possible, to present information on the studied population (i.e. African American women). Since women were not always strictly confined to female quarters (Camp D and later The Willows), and worked and lived side by side with male prisoners or even members of the penitentiary staff, presenting a more general portrait seems relevant to the understanding of these women's environment and experiences (see chapter 5).

The Angola Women's Database built from the penitentiary records also proved useful in extrapolating information on the women's population at certain particular moments where I wanted to discuss the living conditions at the women's camp or the environment of a particular individual or when a particular event occurred. Indeed, registers based on admissions are not convenient tools if one wants to have a clear picture of the carceral population at any given moment, as they make such extrapolations a cumbersome exercise. From the information

gathered in the database, I also designed a “micro-chronology” of the women’s camp over the period 1901-1935 listing every admission and discharge, as well as every disciplinary incident. This makes it possible to deduce at any given moment how many women were held at Camp D. It also makes it possible to discern successive events, or simultaneous events, especially when juxtaposed with the chronology I constituted (from a multitude of disparate sources) listing pertinent events concerning the U.S., Louisiana, LSP, Angola and the women’s camp over a century-period. Finally, this “micro-chronology” allowed for a categorization of discipline incidents (see chapter 8).

2.3.2 ‘Agency’ and ‘experience’: key concepts to understand incarcerated African American women’s conditions and circumstances at Angola

Considerations about ‘agency’ have been central to the development of this doctoral research. This concept appeared useful in my own trajectory as an activist, and oftentimes a spokesperson discussing social justice issues. It has been crucial as well in my aspiration as a social historian to document African American women’s strategies for survival and resistance to (against) practices of confinement and exploitation deployed at Angola. This concept also appeared necessary to avoid falling into the trap of representing these women only as passive victims of oppression, and to avoid reifying their pain²⁴⁸.

According to different authors, the concept of ‘agency’ refers both to an individual’s ability to shape things and the world, to exercise power, and to the individual’s self-perception as an actor, and not just as someone to whom things determined by the larger forces of history happen out of their control²⁴⁹. Obviously, this simplified definition immediately suggests that the notions of

²⁴⁸ Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*, xxvii; Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, 12.

²⁴⁹ Trivellato, “Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory”, 127.

power relations, determinism, individual experiences, subjectivity, and structures must also be mobilized in the discussion on ‘agency’.

In Western history, the concept of ‘agency’ has emerged from the work of E.P. Thompson, one of the leading scholars in social history²⁵⁰. For Thompson, the notion of ‘agency’ is immediately opposed to determinism, as he refuses to consider as inevitable the weight of structures on actors²⁵¹. Likewise, it is my viewpoint that Black women incarcerated at Angola were aware of the oppression the institution subjected them to, and that they consciously deployed strategies of survival in that context.

American philosopher and Queer activist Judith Butler also made a major contribution to the concept of ‘agency’ in her ground-breaking *Gender Trouble*²⁵². In her framework, the subject’s agency emerges in a struggle, a power relationship between the subject and the structures, as explained by French historian of ideas Kim Sang Ong-Van-Cung:

With Butler, [...] the subject is not a necessary effect produced by the standards, but he/she is not completely free to ignore the norm that inaugurates his/her reflexivity. You are fighting against conditions in your own life that you have not been able to choose. If there is a power to act, a freedom, it is in a struggle that takes place within this field of constraints. The capacity to act ‘is never totally determined nor radically free’²⁵³.

²⁵⁰ In the recent preface to a French reprint of his milestone work, this British historian stated that his intention in *The Making of the English Working Class* was to “seek to save [ordinary workers] from the immense condescension of posterity”. Thompson’s concern to highlight the agency of these workers involves their rehabilitation through his writing of history. It acknowledges their ability to both see themselves as actors in history and to reflect on their own conditions and circumstances. Indeed, Thompson multiplies the examples demonstrating that workers are aware of historical processes and of the underlying balance of power. Thompson, *Formation de la classe ouvrière anglaise*, 19.

²⁵¹ Thompson, *Formation de la classe ouvrière anglaise*, 250.

²⁵² Butler, a post-structuralist, embraces the idea of a central subject over the idea of structures predetermining everything. Post-structuralists reject the structuralist perspective on actors considered as mere “cleverly programmed automatons”. They acknowledge that structures limit the subject’s opportunities, but oppose the idea that the subject has no choice. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*; Sewell, “A Theory of Structure”, 2.

²⁵³ [our translation from] « Avec Butler, [...] le sujet n’est pas un effet nécessaire produit par les normes, mais il n’est pas complètement libre d’ignorer la norme qui inaugure sa réflexivité. On se bat contre les conditions de sa propre vie que l’on n’a pas été en mesure de choisir. S’il y a une puissance d’agir, une liberté, c’est dans une lutte qui s’exerce dans ce champ de contraintes. La capacité d’agir ‘n’est jamais totalement déterminée ni radicalement libre’. » In: Ong-Van-Cung, “Critique et subjectivation. Foucault et Butler sur le sujet, Critique and subjectivation. Foucault and Butler on the subject”, 158. Butler’s quote is from: Butler, *Le Récit de soi*, trad. fr. Bruno Ambroise et Valérie Aucouturier, 19.

The concept of ‘agency’ applies particularly when the historical subject is precisely a subject with limited social power (such as an individual held in a custodial institution), and the challenge of a power balance is at the core of the notion of ‘agency’. This dissertation mobilizes this concept to reflect two key findings. First, that marginalized subjects such as incarcerated African American women cannot necessarily influence (much) the development of the carceral state. Second, that, nonetheless, their actions are to be interpreted as attempts to find solutions for themselves (or others) to problems emerging from the conditions imposed by the state through its legal and penal systems. In other words, Black female prisoners’ agency unfolds along their struggles to survive in dire circumstances in captivity. Despite their small degree of latitude, they are trying to find solutions to the problems they are confronted to²⁵⁴.

More recently, historians of emotions, such as Rob Boddice and Mark Smith, have also contributed to the debate on the concept of ‘agency’. From their research also emerges the idea that no historical subject is either totally determined, nor totally free. Their level of agency is deeply connected to their particular (and therefore shifting) historical context²⁵⁵. This provides important keys to my understanding of what agency could look like in Angola’s carceral setting: sometimes, it meant assertiveness and resistance; however, more often than not, it meant silence and compliance, because this was the safest strategy for survival.

²⁵⁴ Revel, « L’histoire au ras du sol », in As French historian Jacques Revel comments on Italian micro-historian Giovanni Levi’s work on peasants: “Everyone, and each in their own place, strives to find an answer to the problems that the great history confronts them with. They do it with varying degrees of success, with more or less cards in hand; they are subject to constraints and solidarities, vertical but also horizontal, which restrict their room for maneuver and their possibility of invention. But they seek to protect themselves from the event, or better, to lean on it to improve their chances.” [our translation from] « [...] tous, et chacun à sa place, s’ingénue à trouver une réponse aux problèmes auxquels la grande histoire les affronte. Ils le font avec plus ou moins de réussite, avec plus ou moins de cartes en main; ils sont soumis à des contraintes et à des solidarités, verticales mais aussi horizontales, qui restreignent leur marge de manœuvre et leur possibilité d’invention. Mais ils cherchent à se protéger de l’événement, mieux, à prendre appui sur lui pour améliorer leurs chances. » In: Levi, *Le pouvoir au village*, XXII.

²⁵⁵ We should not, however, be fooled into thinking that ‘agency’ has an objective existence outside of human situated biology, any more than there are deep-seated underlying emotions that are truly ‘authentic’ in a pure, universal and timeless way. Discussions about agency tend to polarize. The denial of agency leads to an assumption either that human action is entirely biologically determined or else inflexibly culturally prescribed. We say it is neither. To talk of ‘programming’, whether by nature or by nurture, is reductive and unhelpful. Biocultural dynamics permit, more or less, a range of experiences, choices, expressions, and so on. The extent to which this range is available depends upon the specific time, place, culture, structures of power, concepts, and so on. Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 52.

From Boddice and Smith, there is also an understanding that the concept of ‘experience’ is intertwined with the concept of ‘agency’. Going back to E.P. Thompson, the historian considers that it is through experience that the subject emerges as a social subject and an historical actor²⁵⁶. The concept of ‘experience’ has itself been at the heart of intense historiographical debates since American historian Joan Scott’s classic article *The Evidence of Experience*²⁵⁷. Among recent critics of Joan Scott’s perspective on ‘experience’, Boddice and Smith reject the ‘linguistic turn’ that she defended in her 1991 article, arguing that her view has since become outdated as a result of multiple discoveries. In their own practice as historians of emotions, Boddice and Smith mobilize knowledge from the neuro-sciences, which leads them to argue against Scott’s focus on discourse. Rather, their perspective on ‘experience’ encompasses “the body and the brain, the feelings and the senses”²⁵⁸. Like Boddice and Smith, I argue in this dissertation that the Black female body is at the heart of their experiences of incarceration. Boddice and Smith’s perspective on ‘experience’ is therefore something wider than what Scott defended and is particularly useful to my understanding of Black female experiences of incarceration as encompassing “all elements of lived reality”²⁵⁹. This dissertation attempts to describe these women’s historical context, providing both a broad perspective on Black women’s lives and circumstances in Jim Crow Louisiana and an analysis at the micro scale of their physical environment and material conditions, their everyday schedule, and the relationships they had with other historical actors. Therefore, although this dissertation cannot document their inner lives, it provides “pictures” of their daily experiences at Angola.

²⁵⁶ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory, or An Orrery of Errors*, 362.

²⁵⁷ Joan Scott argues that the centrality of the experience is necessary in understanding the subject. She encourages historians and others to consider that it is their experience itself that shapes the subject, during the negotiation (or the ‘struggle’ in Butler’s words) between the subject’s agency and the determinism of the structures in which he/she is immersed: “Making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logics; we know that difference exists, but we don’t understand it as relationally constituted. For that we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience”, 779–80.

²⁵⁸ Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 19.

²⁵⁹ Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 17.

Debates around these concepts occurred among historians of slavery, and are interesting to look at as a point of comparison. Without questioning the important work that has been accomplished around the concept of ‘agency’, in particular by the American school of New Social History with committed historians such as Eugene D. Genovese, Walter Johnson criticizes the reductive vision of certain authors who, writing on slavery, have argued that only a slave who actively resisted slavery demonstrated their agency and their humanity²⁶⁰. According to Johnson, the articulation between the concepts of ‘agency’, ‘resistance’ and ‘humanity’ is dangerous in the context of slavery, especially because it obscures an important part of the reality of people living in bondage, namely the need to submit to their slaveowners as a survival strategy:

to say that enslaved people ‘preserved their humanity’ is to say that they acted in ways that the author recognizes as the ways that human beings would act in a given situation. The actions of enslaved people are thus emptied of any specific meaning beyond the bounded terms of the author’s own definition of ‘humanness’-emptied of personal meaning, political meaning, and cultural meaning, and metaphysical meaning and so on²⁶¹.

Johnson’s viewpoint is especially important for this research, since he argues that while slavery largely determines the living conditions of slaves, they are nonetheless humans who have intelligibility and affectivity about their own condition, as well as relationships with other humans. Johnson’s argument also reflects the position of historian of slavery Stephanie Camp, who argued that enslaved women’s everyday resistance, consisting of “small” actions such as theft, foot-dragging, feigning illness or short-term flight, were oftentimes the only form of agency and dissent that they could exercise because of the high level of control they were subjected to²⁶². Their viewpoint on agency in the context of slavery shares common ground with French historian Arlette Farge’s position on the subjects of her study, the criminalized population in 19th century France, when she states that they conveyed a critical discourse despite their subjugation by the State through its judicial system²⁶³. This dissertation deliberately adopts Johnson, Camp and Farge’s perspectives, which means that it acknowledges African American women’s agency despite their limited capacity for action within the legal and penal systems. It also argues that

²⁶⁰ In her groundbreaking work on enslaved women in the Caribbean, historian Marisa Fuentes exposes in detail the historiographical debates about agency, resistance and social death. See: Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 9–11, 141–43.

²⁶¹ Johnson, “On Agency”, 114.

²⁶² Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 2.

²⁶³ Farge, *Le goût de l’archive*, 145.

agency unfolded both in acts of resistance, and sometimes in acts of perceived subservience and obedience to prison rules, because ultimately Black female prisoners had to make daily choices about their own survival. Placed in a context of state-sanctioned violence and cruelty, they knew very well that their assertiveness would be met by harsh retaliation.

It is also important to remember that Black women who found themselves incarcerated at Angola arrived there with their experiences of living in Jim Crow Louisiana²⁶⁴. Before their incarceration, they were already living in a context marked by adversarial relationships with a white-dominant society where they were offered no protection²⁶⁵. They were already placed in a “multifaceted struggle” with white women, white men, and to a lesser extent, Black men, who all wanted to control their productive and reproductive capacities and their sexuality. To protect themselves, they would often resort to “a self-imposed invisibility” rather than assertiveness and disclosure of their opposition to this hostile world²⁶⁶. In short, Black women who arrived at Angola were already survivors of racialized and gendered forms of terror. It is through this lens that this project understands their agency during their captivity at Angola.

This research proposes to make use of this concept of ‘experience’ to try to capture the complexity of African American women’s conditions at Angola, as well as beyond the penitentiary limits. It adopts a feminist perspective encompassing the effects of labor processes, reproductive processes, legal processes, racializing processes, and so on in shaping the subjects’ experiences. It builds especially on scholars who have demonstrated the hardships of African American women and the ways in which they exercised their agency from slavery to the present.

This project seeks to examine Black women’s experiences of space in various ways: by looking at their housing conditions at Camp D, at their contribution to farm labor, at the way they sometimes claimed ownership of the space, and also by questioning how the long history of the

²⁶⁴ Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black And White Southern Children Learned Race*; Simmons, *Crescent City Girls*; Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*; Vaz, *The “Baby Dolls”*. *Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition*.

²⁶⁵ Gross, “African American Women, Mass Incarceration and the Politics of Protection.”

²⁶⁶ Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women. Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance” in: Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History*, 41.

space from Indigenous occupation to the creation of the penal farm resonated in the captives' lives (see chapters 4 & 5). Relationships among the incarcerated women, between them and their male counterparts (who constituted the overwhelming majority of the carceral population), between them and the penitentiary officials and staff as well as other actors are also examined as an important part of their experiences²⁶⁷.

This project also examines African American women's experiences of time: the time of judicial sentences imposed by the courts following a conviction, and the time of sentences as they unfolded at the penitentiary along strict schedules, the time labored for the profit of the State instead of their own benefit, the time spent away from their families and communities, the time taken out from their lives because of death in custody, the 'good time' earned through behaviors responding to institutional expectations, and the difficult times endured because of behaviors perceived as undesirable and breaches of the penitentiary rules. Placing the intersection of race and gender at the center of this conception of experience, this project seeks to acknowledge its impact on time (see chapters 6 & 7 in particular).

Chapter 7 explores how this applies to Black women's experiences of time at Angola. It proposes to examine what constituted their daily routines as well as what disturbed - sometimes abruptly - these routines. This attempt to approach Black women's temporalities at Angola pays particular attention to those micro-events, which resulted from deliberate resistance strategies deployed by the incarcerated themselves.

Finally, this dissertation documents the experiences of Black female prisoners as lived through their bodies (see chapter 8 in particular). Violence in its different manifestations, including sexual and sexualized violence, receives special attention, as it was a central ingredient of their carceral experiences. This project seeks to provide an understanding of the consequences of violent acts committed in prison, whether prisoner-on-prisoner, staff-on-prisoner or prisoner-on-staff. This

²⁶⁷ This dissertation shows that prisoners would interact with different categories of people: penitentiary administration, staff including chaplain and physician, resident staff members' wives & children, visiting reformers & charities, visiting relatives (if any), local residents, fellow male and female prisoners and "trusties". In addition to these human beings, Angola prisoners had frequent contacts with the animal world: cattle they raised for the farm, pets they adopted as companions, vermin that infested their quarters, and bloodhound dogs that were used to track fugitives.

research also encompasses findings related to Black women's health, and the health care (or rather, lack of) they received in the custodial institution.

The limits of the archival sources that were available for this research are reflected in the range of experiences this dissertation documents and analyses. Indeed, because of the almost complete lack of Black women's voices, the emotional dimension of their experiences of incarceration is barely touched in this dissertation. This, of course, is an important caveat of the research. Nevertheless, this dissertation invites the reader to pay attention to the details provided here on the other dimensions of their experiences, and to use their "informed imagination" (and a good dose of empathy), to comprehend these individuals' complex emotional landscape. From what we know of Black women's material conditions of incarceration (see chapter 5 in particular), it is easy to imagine their daily frustrations, loss of intimacy and sense of deprivation. The level of violence they were subjected could lead to feelings of pain, sentiments of fear, hostility and the need for protection (see chapters 7 and 8 in particular). Hope was certainly also present, in relation to clemency procedures and other mechanisms to obtain an earlier discharge (see chapter 6), or in planning for escape (see chapter 5)²⁶⁸. The anxieties Black women had upon entering the penitentiary and those they had to cope with during their incarceration more likely informed their strategies of survival in this hostile environment²⁶⁹.

2.3.3 Combining qualitative & quantitative data to write narratives

In her dissertation dedicated to Angola, Christina Pruett Hermann argues that: "Quantitative analysis drawn from the database combined with qualitative sources separates myth from reality by showing that life at Angola deviated markedly from public representations of the penal farm

²⁶⁸ Girard and Marcil, *Guide de Survie En Prison*.

²⁶⁹ Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman*, chap. 4.

as a ‘model prison’²⁷⁰. Her statement speaks both to the public denial of the brutality of the carceral regime by penitentiary officials, and to the necessity for the historian to dig in the archives these officials left behind in order to find hidden transcripts. This doctoral research also adopts a mixed method to locate these hidden transcripts. By combining the quantitative analysis derived from the Angola Women’s Database with the qualitative analysis of LSP records and of other sources, this dissertation proposes a narrative of African American women’s experiences of confinement at Angola.

In addition to penitentiary archival material and the outcomes of the database, a variety of sources were analysed to document the experiences of confinement, along the main following topics: space, time, and the Black female body. More particularly, this dissertation explores a variety of questions related to housing and living conditions, labor, power dynamics, racial and gendered hierarchies, institutional violence, and women’s resistance.

The starting point for this dissertation is the prosopography I created from the database of women admitted at Angola, combined with newspapers and with the criminal records I collected in parish courts and other archives. Prosopography is a research method “not interested in the unique, but in the average, the general and the ‘commonness’ in the life stories of more or less large numbers of individuals”²⁷¹. Not unlike Marcel Mauss’s ethnographic method, it allows for the integration of the individual into collective phenomena and, by organizing data, it enables the researcher to “acquire additional significance by revealing connections and patterns influencing historical processes”²⁷². This project understands prosopography as a series production (« mise en série ») intended to offer a more representative portrait of African American women living during Jim Crow at the margins of a white-dominated society, including (but not exclusively) in carceral spaces created to keep them at the margins. By doing so, this research also seeks to highlight the norms of this society, and in particular to explore how white supremacy impacted these women’s ‘trajectories’²⁷³. Prosopography constitutes what French historian Jacques Revel called a ‘choir

²⁷⁰ Hermann, “Specters of Freedom”, 15.

²⁷¹ Verboven, Carlier, and Dumolyn, “A Short Manual in the Art of Prosopography”, 35–69.

²⁷² Verboven, Carlier, and Dumolyn, “A Short Manual in the Art of Prosopography”, 35–69.

²⁷³ The term ‘trajectory’ is borrowed from: Bourdieu, “L’illusion biographique”, 88.

biography’ (« biographie chorale »), in opposition to a ‘heroic biography’. The ‘choir biography’ is interested in several individuals, but it also looks at how their lives differ from the dominant historical narrative:

lives that deviate from the average perhaps lead to better reflection on the balance between the specificity of personal destiny and the whole social system. More than the type, the variety matters. Only a multitude of experiences makes it possible to take into consideration two fundamental dimensions of history: conflicts and potentialities. [...] the choral biography conceives the singular as an element of tension: the individual does not have the mission of revealing the essence of humanity; on the contrary, it must remain particular and fragmented²⁷⁴.

Revel also argues that prosopography allows for a “reconstitution of a space of possibilities from the plurality of particular destinies”²⁷⁵. This project proposes to delineate the borders of individuals’ actions and experiences within the penal institution by bringing to the surface the discrepancies that Black women’s stories create to the institution’s structure and norms it (re)produces. More concretely, I treat incidents revealed in ‘Convict Records’ not only as isolated events concerning an individual or another, but as markers of what could happen to any of the Black women during her incarceration at Angola. For instance, when penitentiary records kept ‘traces’ of two women “chained to bed” for “disobedience”, I read the event as a marker of the extent of violence and humiliation the institution could deploy, and as a warning for all other captive women that this was a possible outcome for their own acts of defiance towards prison rules. I argue the event impacts not only Susie L. and Emma S. who were chained to their beds, but all of Camp D’s Black female occupants²⁷⁶. In a similar fashion, several individual examples are drawn from this prosopography to illustrate each of the topics covered in this dissertation.

²⁷⁴ [our translation from] « des vies qui s’éloignent de la moyenne amènent peut-être à mieux réfléchir sur l’équilibre entre la spécificité du destin personnel et l’ensemble du système social. Plus que le type, importe la variété. Seule une multitude d’expériences permet de prendre en considération deux dimensions fondamentales de l’histoire : les conflits et les potentialités. [...] la biographie chorale conçoit le singulier comme un élément de tension : l’individu n’a pas pour mission de révéler l’essence de l’humanité ; au contraire, il doit rester particulier et morcelé. » in: Revel, *Jeux d’échelles*, 230.

²⁷⁵ [our translation from] “reconstituer un espace des possibles à partir de la pluralité de destins particuliers”. Jacques Revel quoted in Rollet and Nabonnand, *Les uns et les autres: Biographies et prosopographies en histoire des sciences*, 625.

²⁷⁶ Entry for May 21, 1912 for prisoners #5278 and #6879, Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection, pages 577, 753.

This research mobilizes a methodology inspired by micro-history. Historians doing micro-history are centrally concerned with the everyday life experiences of ordinary individuals they recognize as historical actors. I propose “to restrict the field of study to the ‘micro’ scale, and to meticulously seek out the individual protagonists of historical processes”²⁷⁷. To be able to write a social history focused on individuals, their names served as the ‘rudders’ orienting this research, or as “the golden thread guiding the researcher in the labyrinth of archives” in micro-historians Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni’s words²⁷⁸. Although sources did not allow for full biographies, this project highlights biographical sketches for over a hundred different incarcerated women.

As much as possible, I tried to give voice to Black women’s “version of the facts”²⁷⁹. However, their words were scarce and their presence in the sources fragmented. As Giovanni Levi suggests, I looked at these individuals’ lives to find the manifestations of their individual freedom, all the while acknowledging that this freedom is “culturally and socially determined, limited, patiently conquered, [...] at the interstices of general systems of norms”. The interstices exist in every system of norms where contradictions arise, making it possible for actors to exercise their freedom of choice. A carceral institution, despite its ambition to exercise total control over its captives, is no exception because its functioning is made possible by illegal activities by prison authorities (for instance through discipline that overcomes the range of legality) as well as by prisoners (for instance through contraband)²⁸⁰.

Among the sources already detailed above, special attention was given to clemency applications and trial records as a form of testimony from these women. Indeed, for the historian, paying attention to these women’s words, all the while being careful to maintain a critical distance to them, and how they are “shaped” by questions and procedures predetermined by the institution is necessary. Their language “expresses with greenness or awkwardness, conviction or fear, the complexity of social relations and the ways to make a good impression, the complexity that is

²⁷⁷ Cerutti, “Microhistory: Social Relations versus Cultural Models? Some Reflections on Stereotypes and Historical Practices”, 20.

²⁷⁸ [our translation from] « le fil d’Ariane qui guide le chercheur dans le labyrinthe des archives ». In: Ginzburg and Poni, “La micro-histoire”, 2.

²⁷⁹ Cerutti, “Microhistory: Social Relations versus Cultural Models? Some Reflections on Stereotypes and Historical Practices”, 21.

²⁸⁰ Jean-Paul Brodeur in: Lafleur, *Foucault à Montréal*.

imposed by social and political structures”²⁸¹. Lacking the dryness inherent to penitentiary ledgers, these two types of sources allowed for interrogations from different angles to reveal information about the person, the dominant culture, and their material conditions and daily lives in Jim Crow Louisiana²⁸². Following the example of French historian Arlette Farge, I proceeded to ‘roam’ in the archives and to examine the subtext of my sources in order to “detect intimate facts where almost nothing is said, but in which many things appear”²⁸³. Farge believes that history is a narrative capable of restoring a character as a subject, and her goal is to “seize those outbursts of life” all the while stating its limits: “We cannot resuscitate lives stranded in the archives. This is no reason to have them die a second time”²⁸⁴.

Judicial sources, as Italian historian Simona Cerutti argues, not only record behaviors that reflect the social structure of oppression, but also have the potential to reveal “claims, intentions, and proposals”. They reveal people’s strategies and agency, their actions and their aspirations²⁸⁵. Kept away from places of power where their fates were debated and decided upon (i.e. courtroom, penitentiary, parole board), Black women retained their will and subjectivity nonetheless. However, it would be misleading to read in the judicial archives these women’s freedom and emancipation²⁸⁶. Instead, I tried to reveal dimensions of their individual lives that were obliterated in history, including potentialities that their incarceration compromised. As mentioned earlier, the concept of ‘agency’ allows us to rediscover the possible and plausible fates that did not occur in these women’s lives, all the while acknowledging that their ability to take action had been impeded by their circumstances, i.e. their place in the world as subalterns.

²⁸¹ [our translation from] « exprime avec verveur ou maladresse, conviction ou crainte, la complexité des relations sociales et des façons d’y faire bonne figure, celle-là même qui est imposée par les structurations sociales et politiques. » In: Farge, *Le goût de l’archive*, 102–3 See also page 107.

²⁸² Clancy-Smith, “Locating Women as Migrants in Nineteenth Century Tunis” in Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry, *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, 35–55.

²⁸³ [our translation from] « relever ces faits intimes où presque rien n’est dit, et où pourtant tant de choses transpirent. » In: Farge, *Le goût de l’archive*, 81,97.

²⁸⁴ [our translation from] « saisir ces éclats de vie »; « On ne ressuscite pas les vies échouées en archives. Ce n’est pas une raison pour les faire mourir une deuxième fois. » In: Farge, *Le goût de l’archive*, 98, 145.

²⁸⁵ Cerutti, “Microhistory: Social Relations versus Cultural Models? Some Reflections on Stereotypes and Historical Practices”, 27.

²⁸⁶ Farge, *Le goût de l’archive*, 54.

Among the information brought to light by the prosopography method, I was attentive to what ‘Convict Records’ (as well as accounts from other carceral spaces) provided as descriptions of the forced labor executed by women. For instance, they inform on assigned tasks, duration for assignments, and places of work (see chapter 7).

Another important aspect of the prosopography is what it teaches us on the prison discipline and prisoners’ defiance. ‘Conduct records’ (as well as investigation reports) have been examined not only as sources of information on sanctioned punishments and state violence imposed on victimized women, but also as evidence of Black female resistance to discipline rules and behavioral norms that the administration tried to enforce at Angola. Some escapes and other “rebellious outbreaks” (riots, strikes, hunger strikes, etc.) were also chronicled in newspapers, although these concern mostly male prisoners. Only a small portion of the disciplinary incidents involved African American women, but they are certainly important to understand the carceral context they lived in²⁸⁷. Always presented in the LSP registers as individual acts void of intention or of political will, rather than carrying intentions, grievances and claims, Black women’s acts of resistance were perceived by the penitentiary officials as a social disorder to contain and punish. These incidents emerge from the documents as isolated acts, when the analysis actually shows that these are not one-off situations, but rather patterns of Black women’s defiance towards the institution (see chapter 8)²⁸⁸. Taken together, they reveal “that something is wrong with the system”, that these women knew something was wrong and that they tried to challenge these wrongs²⁸⁹. Every act of resistance threw sand in the gears of the day-to-day functioning of the penitentiary, for instance by slowing down labor productivity (see chapter 7). Presented in the sources as anomalies of the carceral regime, they were rather parts of the daily life at the penitentiary²⁹⁰.

²⁸⁷ Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows”; Tepperman, “The Familiar as Ahistorical: Rethinking American Prison Rebellions.”

²⁸⁸ Trouillot commented that the lack of acknowledgement of the humanity of the enslaved prevented the observers to interpret slave resistance as a political global phenomenon rather than individual and isolated acts. See: Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 83–84.

²⁸⁹ About slaves’ resistance, Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot argued: “To acknowledge resistance as a mass phenomenon is to acknowledge the possibility that something is wrong with the system”. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 84.

²⁹⁰ Jean-Paul Brodeur and Jean-Claude Bernheim in: Lafleur, *Foucault à Montréal*.

As discussed earlier, detecting Black women's agency in carceral settings can be a perilous exercise, as is the case with slavery²⁹¹. To document incidences of punishment, solitary confinement, and escape, the penitentiary records were scanned, in particular the physical punishments recorded in the 'conduct records'. These sources are particularly perilous to use because they present the official version of a matter both sensitive in public opinion and vividly debated in penology circles, i.e. physical punishment. They are also problematic as there are often no other sources available to confirm or verify the information. Still, they are interesting because they provide information not only about events and crisis at Angola but also about organizational aspects (especially when it comes to labor and production), dynamics, and behaviors (what constitutes expected behaviors? What is normal or not normal?). As prison historian Peter Spierenburg warns us, the "emphasis on breaches of discipline is simply a reflection of the content of the sources"²⁹². Indeed, prison logbooks do not record prisoners' compliant behaviors, unless these behaviors were somehow exceptional and deserving of time credits (for instance, participating in the fight against floods). Of course, this creates a distorted image of prison life where violence might be amplified. However, historian Mark Carleton reports that the discipline incidents were under-recorded and that Angola prisoners were subjected to high levels of institutional violence:

[...] guard captains had inflicted ten thousand admitted floggings - sometimes consisting of as many as fifty lashes each - between 1928 and 1940. And only 'official punishments' were recorded. An indeterminate but probably much larger number of beatings was inflicted upon convicts working in the cane fields, vegetable patches, and elsewhere. One result was a higher number of deaths (if not an actually higher death rate) between 1931 and 1935: under the general managership of [Governor Huey] Long's appointee, R. L. Himes, an average of forty-one convicts perished annually, the highest toll officially on record since termination of the convict lease system a generation before²⁹³.

As mentioned above, I paid special attention to the interlocking issues of violence and victimization, sexual or sexualized violence being often at the heart of women's lives in a male-dominated environment (see chapters 5 and 8). Very little evidence was found that allowed

²⁹¹ Rubin, "Resistance as Agency? Incorporating the Structural Determinants of Prisoner Behaviour"; Johnson, "On Agency."

²⁹² Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience*, 193.

²⁹³ Krebs, "Blood Took Penitentiary 'Out of Red' Records Show", *The Times-Picayune*, May 11, 1941 in Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 112-13.

documenting the intimate life of the incarcerated. Although there is some indication of homosociability and even of same-sex activities at Angola's female quarters, there is not enough information to confirm or infirm the importance of women's homosexual relationships in their experiences of confinement (see chapter 8)²⁹⁴.

Again, the examination of official material produced by the penitentiary administration, such as annual reports, was key to drawing a picture (or rather pictures) of the conditions at Angola. These reports, produced to build a positive public image for the penitentiary, and ultimately for the governor responsible for its operations, have to be examined critically. Although these reports (as well as other administrative documents and financial data) often contain more information on production than on prisoners themselves, they can also inform about some of the features of the confinement at LSP. Physicians' reports and chaplains' reports included in the penitentiary reports to the legislature inform about medical and religious activities held at Angola. Medical issues were treated with various degrees of importance throughout the period, as this research demonstrates (see chapter 8). Meanwhile, religion took an increasing part of the prisoners' life (although not as important as it is today at Angola) with a chaplain being employed by the penitentiary and reporting in official accounts (see chapter 7)²⁹⁵. These, as well as reports arising from investigations conducted at Angola, allowed for making hypotheses regarding the dynamics at stake between incarcerated persons and 'trusties', with prison guards, and with the prison administration²⁹⁶.

²⁹⁴ This classic study published in 1965 argued that homosexual liaisons are the primary foundation of the social structure of female prisoners. Kassebaum and Ward, *Women's Prison*.

²⁹⁵ Gaskill, "Moral Rehabilitation: Religion, Race, and Reform in America's Incarceration Capital."

²⁹⁶ Trusties were other prisoners granted privileges and specific roles by the penitentiary officials. Despite being an important component on carceral life at Angola, as well as in other penitentiaries, they were given little attention in the scholarly literature so far. To my knowledge, the following is the only research dedicated to the trusty system, and it focuses on Parchman, the Mississippi penal farm, where it was first created: McWhorter, "The Trusty." McWhorter argues that the trusty system has its origins in slave plantations.

Conclusion of chapter 2

Because the information about Black female prisoners at Angola was dispersed and fragmented, I resorted to collecting a wide range of sources and ‘mining’ them to find ‘traces’ of their presence and clues about their lived experiences. These sources originate mostly from the carceral institution where they were held (rather than from the women themselves). Therefore, they had to be read carefully and critically to flush out institutional denials and to uncover Black women’s experiences. The design of Angola Women’s Database from surviving penitentiary ledgers, court records, newspapers accounts and other sources, allowed both for statistical analysis and for the constitution of a prosopography. Quantitative analysis served to draw the collective portrait of these women, whereas the set of individual stories contained in the prosopography served to document different aspects of their incarceration, with a particular focus on coerced labor, institutional violence and women’s dealings (including their resistance) with prison rules. The attention given to individual stories in this project is a purposeful attempt to counter the deindividuation and silence of Black women in institutional archives. This dissertation tells the stories of Black female prisoners at Angola, despite their erasure from official accounts, which in itself reveals the power dynamics at play at the penitentiary. By exercising their agency, Black female prisoners did not destroy institutional power or dismantle Jim Crow; however, they constituted themselves as historical subjects, and forced us to pay attention.

CHAPTER 3

LOUISIANA, CARCERAL STATE

This chapter examines the history of the Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP) from its origins in the antebellum period. It provides context for understanding the development of the state institution throughout the 19th century, which will be helpful to understand the transition that occurred at the dawn of the 20th century, and to grasp the extent of the continuities and discontinuities that the Jim Crow penitentiary system offered compared with the previous carceral regimes. This chapter also pays particular attention to the African Americans, and especially women, who were confined by the state of Louisiana before and after the Civil War. Finally, this chapter provides statistical data on Louisiana incarceration rates in the 20th century, as well as numbers on the penitentiary population as a whole. Altogether, the data gathered for this chapter provides a useful context to situate Black female incarceration within the development of the carceral state in Louisiana and in the U.S.

3.1 Creation of the State Penitentiary and Antebellum Lease

In 1835, state prisoners, who were held until then in the squalid New Orleans prison, were transferred to a new state penitentiary in Baton Rouge. The new building, nicknamed the “Walls”, was erected on the plan of the prison at Wethersfield, Connecticut. Its features were “all

the essentials of the Auburn system”; for instance, prisoners were kept in individual cells²⁹⁷. In this new penitentiary, prisoners’ labor assignments were determined by race and gender. “Male prisoners labored in a brickyard and in a variety of shops” but at the beginning of the 1840s, Black male prisoners (both enslaved and free) were removed from the penitentiary population to serve on public works. Enslaved incarcerated Black women were few - for instance, as of December 31, 1938 there were six of them - but they nevertheless were crucial to the functioning of the “Walls”. Enslaved women were “employed washing & mending” in the penitentiary, and the first white woman who entered the penitentiary by the end of 1843 joined them at work in the prison laundry²⁹⁸.

However, state officials could not make the penitentiary an efficient or self-sufficient undertaking as intended. Many people considered it an “expensive luxury”, and the state decided to withdraw from its management. Only nine years after the opening of the “Walls” in Baton Rouge, Louisiana signed its first convict leasing contract with a private company, McHatton, Pratt & Company²⁹⁹. At first, this contract, entitled “An act to provide for the better administration of the Louisiana Penitentiary”, did not bring any money to the state. The company was not required to pay anything for the labor force it made use of to produce goods at the penitentiary. However, the lease had the advantage of relieving the state from the expense or caring for its prisoners, which the company assumed.

It should be explained that Louisiana embarked on convict leasing twenty years after the first U.S. state had inaugurated this system³⁰⁰. Kentucky’s Frankfort penitentiary (opened in 1800) became the most profitable carceral institution in the country during the 19th century through the leasing system³⁰¹. The Louisiana lessee took charge of the state prisoners to put them to work, and sold the product of their work without the state coffers being impacted, either positively or negatively. In 1846, Louisiana’s penitentiary factory produced some twenty-four thousand horse

²⁹⁷ LeBlanc, “Selected Limitations on the Organization of Treatment in a ‘Modern’ Prison”, 7.

²⁹⁸ Forret, “Before Angola”, 141–42; Quote on page 141.

²⁹⁹ “Angola Outliving Reputation”, *State Advocate*, April 29, 1984.

³⁰⁰ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 9.

³⁰¹ Knepper, “The Kentucky Penitentiary at Frankfort and the Origins of America’s First Convict Lease System, 1798-1843”, quoted by: Forret, “Before Angola”, 147.

and mule shoes for the U.S. military for the Mexican War³⁰². Prisoners also produced “Bagging and Bale rope, coarse negro shirtings and drillings, linseys, colored and white, the best coarse negro shoes, etc.”, which were advertised in newspapers to be sold to planters³⁰³. The following year, McHatton, Pratt & Co. obtained a contract to furnish bricks needed for the construction of a five-story state capitol. Conflicts arose between the lessee and the architect over the (poor) quality of the bricks. Sources are contradictory about the involvement of the lessee - and therefore of the prisoners - in the construction of the capitol (or more precisely, the laying-out of those bricks)³⁰⁴. Nevertheless, another five-year lease was signed in 1850 with McHatton and his new associates. This time, the contract would guarantee a \$1,000 annual revenue to the state.

When McHatton, Pratt & Company had assumed control of the penitentiary, there were 176 state prisoners, including six enslaved individuals, all of whom were women: Silvia, Eliza, Celeste, Rhoda, Azaline, and Carmalite³⁰⁵. Three of them (Eliza, Rhoda, and Azaline) served at least twenty years at the “Walls”³⁰⁶. Until the construction in 1856 of new “apartments for female prisoners”, no female quarters existed to house them apart from their male counterparts³⁰⁷. The next year, a journalist stated with a certain assurance that: “the females have a substantial building to themselves, and are never brought in contact with the men”³⁰⁸. Occasionally a female prisoner gave birth in prison long after the beginning of their sentence, which suggests that they were either in contact with male prisoners or with male guards. Enslaved children (Eli, Emeline, Emily, Joseph, Joe Wilson, and Washington) were listed as ‘born in the penitentiary’ in the federal census of 1860³⁰⁹. Children born from enslaved mothers during their incarceration became property of the state of Louisiana, and Louisiana law prescribed that the state might dispose freely of them, as could any other slaveholder. Indeed, research reveals that: “Altogether,

³⁰² Bauer, *American Prison*, 82.

³⁰³ “Louisiana Penitentiary”, *Baton Rouge Gazette*, August 29, 1846. “Building of Old State Capitol is Told in Records”, *State Times Advocate*, May 16, 1912.

³⁰⁴ “The State Buildings”, *Democratic Advocate*, September 15, 1847.

³⁰⁵ Forret, “Before Angola”, 147.

³⁰⁶ Forret, “Before Angola”, 154.

³⁰⁷ Forret, “Before Angola”, 158.

³⁰⁸ *Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet*, July 14, 1857, quoted by: Forret, “Before Angola”, 158.

³⁰⁹ Forret, “Before Angola”, 158.

at least twelve children slaves were born in the penitentiary [were] sold away from their convict mothers”³¹⁰.

The number of enslaved African Americans at the “Walls” increased during the period of the lease. Between 1851 and 1861, the number of enslaved Black women confined at the Baton Rouge penitentiary oscillated between twelve and seventeen. Women were mostly employed in prison maintenance. Cornelia’s occupation was seamstress, while another enslaved woman, Euvenia, was a servant³¹¹. In turn, Black men (enslaved and free) were brought back from public works to the penitentiary to labor in its cotton factory³¹². The lessees had bought a ninety-horsepower steam engine and other machinery to create a cotton bagging and rope factory. While the factory was capable of producing one thousand yards of bagging per day, the penitentiary did not have enough captive laborers to meet the scale of production. The lessees asserted that they were deprived of a labor force “to which they [were] entitled under the contract”. They criticized the lower courts for sentencing people to parish jails rather than to the state penitentiary. It is uncertain if parish judges changed their ways, or if the number of prisoners just became too large to hold locally, but the fact of the matter is that: “Six years after their complaint, the number of inmates had increased more than 50 percent, reaching 300”³¹³. By 1857, the penitentiary was making \$44,000 in net profit, though according to the lease contract, the state of Louisiana only got a fraction of this colossal sum, the rest going to the private company operating the penitentiary operations³¹⁴.

In Louisiana parish jails, the situation was not more enviable for African Americans. As recent research demonstrates, enslaved African Americans were incarcerated at rates comparable to today’s mass incarceration. Historian John K. Bardes brought to light the existence of a “police jail” opened in 1805 in New Orleans operating a “workhouse” where only Black individuals were confined. Similar workhouses existed in Baltimore, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, and

³¹⁰ Forret, “Before Angola”, 161.

³¹¹ Forret, “Before Angola”, 153.

³¹² Forret, “Before Angola”, 147–48.

³¹³ Bauer, *American Prison*, 82.

³¹⁴ The equivalent of \$1.2 million, or \$4,000 per inmate, in 2018 dollars according to Bauer. Bauer, *American Prison*, 83.

Louisville. Enslaved individuals' custody in that institution was designed to be "worse than slavery". Slaveholders paid a daily fee to public authorities to have their slaves disciplined and humiliated: forced to work in chains and shackles on outdoor public work (roads, levees, land-clearing, garbage collection), slaves also received brutal corporal punishment. According to Bardes, the term "chain gang" was used for the first time in New Orleans in the 1820s to replace the former "chain of blacks" appellation (which originated from the French colonies in the Caribbean). These "doubly captive" slaves were the first people "employed" to clean the city of New Orleans³¹⁵. Before the Civil War, the cities of Natchez, Vicksburg, Memphis, and Nashville all had chain gangs coercing slaves. In 1846-1847, 1,480 persons were detained in the New Orleans workhouse. Only three percent of them had been convicted after a trial. Sixty-four percent of them were fugitive slaves. According to Bardes, around one percent of the city's slave population was confined in the workhouse. Most individuals were held for a short period (a few days or a few months), but some stayed for ten, fifteen years or even for the remaining of their lives, becoming the city's primary labor force³¹⁶.

Prisoners' coerced labor generated enviable wealth. Texas also built a penitentiary in the same period, which was the state's largest factory and "quickly became the main Southern supplier of textiles west of the Mississippi"³¹⁷. The same logic prevailed in Texas and in Louisiana: "If a profit of several thousand dollars can be made on the labor of twenty slaves, why may not a similar profit be made on the labor of twenty convicts"³¹⁸? Coerced labor within the convict leasing system was instrumental to southern industrialization, and penitentiaries became southern states' assets to counter northern states' economic dominance³¹⁹.

³¹⁵ Some Louisiana parishes still use prisoners for that purpose. During one of my field trips, I saw a group of Black men wearing orange jumpsuits picking up garbage on the sides of Road 147, between Winnfield and Arcadia.

³¹⁶ Bardes, "Mass Incarceration in the Age of Slavery and Emancipation"; For more on slaves' incarceration in Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, and Arkansas, see: Birch and Buchanan, "The Penalty of a Tyrant's Law: Landscapes of Incarceration during the Second Slavery."

³¹⁷ Bauer, *American Prison*, 83.

³¹⁸ *Telegraph and Texas Register*, quoted in: Bauer, *American Prison*, 82.

³¹⁹ For a discussion of the economic aspect of convict leasing see: Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South*; Colvin, *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs: Social Theory and the History of Punishment in Nineteenth-Century America*.

Despite recurring debates on its brutal treatment of prisoners, and moreover on the financial implications for the state budget, the convict leasing system would remain in operation in Louisiana practically without interruption until 1901. Indeed, private lessees raked in the profits from this human suffering. In 1852, Senator G.W. Watterson of Baton Rouge complained that prisoners, a majority of whom were Caucasian at the time, were treated like slaves. To be clear, everyone was not concerned by the fate of the incarcerated. Another state senator, Senator J.W. Butler of Natchitoches, argued that the violence exerted against state prisoners was justified: “without some means to make the prisoners stand in fear, it would be utterly impossible to maintain any discipline or subordination, and we know of no mode of punishment less cruel, and more effective, than a proper amount of flogging”³²⁰.

The Civil War resulted in the strengthening of private lessees’ hold on the state penitentiary and on state prisoners. During the armed conflict, the “Walls” were occupied by Union troops in Baton Rouge, and Louisiana had to send its state prisoners to the neighboring state of Texas³²¹. The partial destruction of the “Walls” in “the hands of the enemy” made it impossible for the State of Louisiana to conduct custodial operations in its Baton Rouge facility when the conflict was over. The antebellum system, when the lessees operated the penitentiary in lieu of the state, could not continue as it was. The prison, the prisoners and the prison management had to be all farmed out into private control and outside of the “Walls”³²².

³²⁰ Senate Journal 1852, quoted in: Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 11.

³²¹ For this purpose, the Louisiana Legislature adopted Act No. 35 (1865) “AN ACT Relative to convicts sentenced to hard labor in the Penitentiary”. https://lasc.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=29068836 Accessed July 25, 2022.

³²² George Washington Cable, *The Silent South* (1907); Cable, “The Convict Lease System in Southern States”, *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections* (1883), quoted in: Mouledous, “Organizational Goals and Structural Change: A Study of the Organization of Prison Social System”, 50.

3.2 Emancipation and the Second Phase of Convict Leasing

For enslaved people, Emancipation meant the promise of freedom, but their efforts to build autonomous lives afterwards were met with great resistance, especially by southern planters affected by labor shortages. In addition, dominant white interests perceived freed African Americans as a threat to the racial order and to white property, since most of them were destitute after the war. As historian Mark Colvin argued: “The key question following the war was what to do with the former slaves who were now emancipated”³²³. Throughout the South, Black Codes and vagrancy ordinances were adopted to address this new “Negro problem”. Indeed, legislation such as Black codes or vagrancy statutes became instrumental in funneling African Americans into the penal system, in Louisiana as much as in other southern states. Historian John Barde’s research sheds light on the situation in New Orleans shortly after the war:

New Orleans’s war on vagrancy reveals the extent to which the criminal justice system mediated freedpeople’s emancipatory experiences. Virtually every formerly enslaved person in New Orleans either suffered vagrancy incarceration or witnessed the vagrancy arrest of friends or family members. Such stories of confinement and protest shed new light on the fraught everyday struggles to define freedom’s meaning³²⁴.

For journalist Douglas Blackmon as well, there is no doubt that the rise of incarceration in America following the Civil War was a direct reaction to the Emancipation of enslaved African Americans. Blackmon, who conducted his investigation in Alabama, showed links between local and county manoeuvres, and state, regional and national decisions and events, which concurred to secure Black labor through the incarceration process. The main subject of his investigation, a young Black man named Green Cottenham, was accused of vagrancy in a town near to where he lived. Sentenced for one year to Pratt Mines, he “had committed no true crime”; indeed, “Cottenham’s offense was blackness”. His sentence amounted to a death sentence, as he never returned from the mines and died in custody from overwork and brutal treatment³²⁵. After short-

³²³ Colvin, *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs*, 215.

³²⁴ Barde, “Redefining Vagrancy: Policing Freedom and Disorder in Reconstruction New Orleans, 1862–1868”, 73.

³²⁵ Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name : The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, 2.

lived gains made during Reconstruction, alongside the voter disenfranchisement, segregation, and extra-legal violence practiced by the white majority were the use of the criminal justice system to “maintain the social, industrial, and civic inferiority of the descendants of chattel slaves”, which was the true nature of the “race problem of the South”³²⁶. Historian Heather Ann Thompson argues that the first prison crisis in the U.S. was in reaction to Emancipation. Locking up African Americans as criminals on the basis of makeshift legislation, trumped charges and so on was the most effective way Southern whites had found to keep them in a position of social and economic dependency. Moreover, Thompson argues that this was not a southern exception: African Americans were also over-represented in northern prisons, where they faced brutal conditions and were exploited for their labor³²⁷.

In many southern states, the percentage of non-white prisoners nearly doubled between 1850 and 1870. In some of the states, the increase was even more dramatic. For example, whereas 2 percent of the Alabama prison population was non-white in 1850, 74 percent was non-white in 1870, though the total non-white population increased by only 3 percent³²⁸. These numbers attest to the racial nature of criminal punishment. In Louisiana, Black prisoners constituted the majority of state prisoners after the Civil War. In 1868, there were already 212 Black prisoners (71 percent), compared with 85 whites³²⁹. The situation prompted the Board of Control (the ruling body presiding over the Louisiana State Penitentiary) to question whether the legislature should not “inquire into the reason why so many [Blacks] are sent to the institution for the term of three, four, and six months, upon the most trivial charges. Does there not lurk beneath, the low, mean motive of depriving them of the right[s] of citizenship”³³⁰.

³²⁶ Quincy Ewing, “The Heart of the Race Problem” (1909), quoted in: Fields, “Whiteness, Racism, and Identity”, 53–54.

³²⁷ Thompson, “From Researching the Past to Reimagining the Future, Locating Carceral Crisis and the Key to Its End, in the Long Twentieth Century.”

³²⁸ Behrens, Uggens, and Manza, “Ballot Manipulation and the Menace of Negro Domination: Racial Threat and Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States, 1850-2002”, 598.

³²⁹ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 45.

³³⁰ State of Louisiana, Annual Report of the Board of Control (1868) quoted by: Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 15.

Many states had recourse to convict leasing in the aftermath of the Civil War in order to “manage” the growing number of incarcerated African American freedpeople. According to historian Edward L. Ayers: “Within fifteen years after the war, all the ex-Confederate states allowed businesses to submit bids for the labor of the state’s felons”. Public support for the convict leasing system came alongside demands for “governmental frugality” amid whites’ unwillingness to support destitute African Americans, as well as a traditional disregard for alleged criminals’ life conditions³³¹. Indeed, according to Ayers, the convict leasing system provided capitalists with steady and substantial profits: “Labor costs were fixed and low, problems of labor uncertainty were reduced to the vanishing point, lucrative jobs could be undertaken that others would not risk, convicts could be driven at a pace free workers would not tolerate”³³². Forged through negotiations between private companies and states, the convict leasing system also benefitted from the support of the federal government through financial incentives. Over one hundred million acres as well as millions of dollars in subsidies were given to railroad companies throughout the United States to build railroads. These companies were at the forefront of the convict leasing system in several states, either as lessees or as lessees’ subcontractors. This occurred in the same period that freed African Americans saw their demands for homestead or provision of land rejected, a failure of federal vision that was not only detrimental to their financial and social autonomy, but that of their descendants³³³.

Louisiana was no exception. Prisoners in Louisiana were leased (or sub-leased) to railroad companies as well as to levee construction teams and to plantations, including one owned by a local parish judge³³⁴. In 1868, the company Huger & Jones took over the lease contract with the Louisiana State Penitentiary, only to clandestinely sell it back to James, Buckner and Company. One of the company’s associates was Samuel L. James, a former Confederate major and planter. In 1870, James became the sole lessee when he managed to secure a very advantageous 21-year lease, presumably through bribing a few state politicians³³⁵. Nonetheless, James met some

³³¹ Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South*, 191.

³³² Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 193.

³³³ Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 467.

³³⁴ “A Hancock Legacy”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 2, 1880, quoted in: Armstrong, “Slavery Revisited in Penal Plantation Labor”, 901.

³³⁵ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, chap. 1.

opposition in the legislature, especially because of the working conditions his business model imposed upon the incarcerated. For instance, Reconstruction Governor Henry C. Warmoth, elected in large part by Black votes, declared: “Where the lessees have absolute power over the prisoners the tendency is to work them too much and feed them too little”³³⁶. Reporter Shane Bauer also remarked that:

James’s industrial project was so ambitious that he didn’t have enough prisoners to fill the demand. To keep hands operating the prison factory’s two thousand spindles day and night, he imported 150 Chinese laborers in 1871. Brought by steamer from Alabama, they were likely the first Chinese to settle in Baton Rouge. They worked in the prison every night until six in the morning, earning \$22 a month in gold (about \$425 in 2018 dollars), roughly the equivalent of the cost of maintaining his convicts³³⁷.

In 1873, a joint committee of senators and representatives inspected the “Walls” and found it nearly deserted. James had sent the male prisoners to work on levee and railroad construction or subcontracted them to landowners for agricultural labor. According to the federal Department of Labor, a prisoner doing levee and railroad work cost one-twentieth of a wage worker³³⁸. Male prisoners’ labor on railroad and levees took precedence over free labor in these sectors; for instance coerced labor was instrumental in the completion of the New Orleans Pacific railroad. As for Black female prisoners, “Former female slaves [who constituted the first cohort of state prisoners after the war] were contracted out for field or domestic work”³³⁹. They were also worked directly by James (and later by his son) on the Angola plantation James owned, mostly as domestic servants (see Chapter 4, section 4.1.3).

Problems of a custodial nature arose from James’s managerial decisions. For instance, convict camps scattered throughout the state varied in operation and treatment of the prisoners. Prisoners would often “march for miles from one work site to the next, working from sunrise to sunset”³⁴⁰. In many camps, “Leg irons and shackles appeared on the scene and began snapping shut about the convicts’ ankles, sharply curtailing their freedom of movement. [...] Extremely long working

³³⁶ Quoted in: Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, “Bad Girls, Convict Women, Part 1: 1835-1901”, 51.

³³⁷ Bauer, *American Prison*, 121–22.

³³⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, Second Edition (1887), quoted in: Bauer, *American Prison*, 122.

³³⁹ Quoted in: Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, “Bad Girls, Convict Women, Part 1: 1835-1901”, 52.

³⁴⁰ “A Hancock Legacy”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 2, 1880, quoted in: Armstrong, “Slavery Revisited in Penal Plantation Labor”, 902.

hours were augmented by poor food in insufficient quantity”³⁴¹. Prisoners were kept in leg chains day and night, and were even chained together when in the fields. Brutality was also an everyday occurrence where “Floggings, isolation, electric shocks, beatings with chains, blackjacks and belts were routine”³⁴². Sources do not reveal if prisoners were kept at night in barracks or in mobile cages, as it was the case in other convict camps in the South.

The state of Louisiana also had financial issues with the lessee. In 1875, Louisiana sued Major James in hopes of recovering \$50,000 in past due payments on the lease. The case never went to trial, and the parties eventually settled. According to historian Mark Carleton, “Greed, not lack of revenue, precluded payment” since in 1870 alone, Major James had concluded half a million dollars worth of business³⁴³. Also in 1875, in order to avoid competition with free labor, the state of Louisiana passed Act 22, prohibiting prisoners’ labor outside of the Baton Rouge penitentiary, and making it a misdemeanor. James ignored Act 22, sending prisoners to various labor camps and plantations, and manoeuvred adroitly to have it repealed, a quest in which he succeeded in 1878, after the end of Reconstruction. The state of Louisiana did not want to make any financial provision for the care of its prisoners, and it was still more advantageous to have James exploit them, even if he was not contributing to the state finances as much as agreed upon in his contract. Over the period 1873-1881, he contributed only \$5 instead of the \$22,000 he owed the State³⁴⁴.

During the 1880s, James was attacked virulently several times in the press, especially in the pages of *The Daily Picayune* whose editor, C. Harrison Parker (a member of the Democratic party who would become one of the first members of the Board of Control which took over the penal system in 1901), criticized the brutal treatment inflicted on the incarcerated, which resulted in a high death toll³⁴⁵. Nevertheless, James’s sway over the carceral institution remained, even as he adapted his business activities. During the 1880s, the subcontracting of prisoners’ coerced labor on plantations had become widespread, even the need for such labor for levees and

³⁴¹ LeBlanc, “Selected Limitations on the Organization of Treatment in a ‘Modern’ Prison”, 10–11.

³⁴² Vodicka, “Prison Plantation: The Story of Angola”, 34.

³⁴³ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 15, 27.

³⁴⁴ Biennial Report, State Treasurer (1890), quoted in: Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 55–56.

³⁴⁵ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 37.

railroads decreased. Moreover, four successive bills proposing the abolition of the lease were defeated over the period 1884-1890. Each time, a majority of Democrats and Republicans each enunciated support for the system and for James as the sole lessee³⁴⁶. Carleton underlined that during Reconstruction, Black legislators held the balance of power and were instrumental in the vote against the abolition of the lease³⁴⁷. In contrast with Louisiana, Black elected officials in Georgia and South Carolina consistently opposed the convict leasing system³⁴⁸.

To be sure, Major James had a network of business partners who had little consideration for prisoners' conditions, especially when the majority of these prisoners were Black. For instance, Peter J. Trevezant, who controlled a convict camp in Pointe Coupee parish, was one of the founders of the White League in Louisiana. Elected as a State Representative, Trevezant was described as "conspicuous in the struggle to redeem North Louisiana from negro and carpetbag rule"³⁴⁹.

The Prison Reform Association of Louisiana, formed in New Orleans in 1886, aimed at the abolition of the lease system (particularly the use of prisoners on plantations) but was unsuccessful in convincing the State legislature that it would be financially rewarding. Despite such opposition to the convict leasing system and to the lessee, in 1890 Louisiana adopted Act 114, which renewed James' contract for another 10-year period. Negotiations conducted in tandem with a dubious bidding process led to a deal setting \$50,000 as the annual payment. While Act 114 officially excluded prisoners from plantation work, there existed no actual control mechanism over James' actions: the Board of Control was defunct, and no position of inspector existed. Conflicts between the state and the lessee continued over the penitentiary lease. In 1894, the state of Louisiana prosecuted Samuel L. James to have him pay the balance of his annual payment. The state claimed James owed \$10,000 on his annual payment. Judge Monroe awarded a judgment of \$6,000 in favor of plaintiff³⁵⁰.

³⁴⁶ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, chap. 2.

³⁴⁷ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 66.

³⁴⁸ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 68.

³⁴⁹ *Lafayette Advertiser*, November 28, 1891; "Dr. Peter Trevezant Dead", *The Town Talk*, November 11, 1909; "Hon. A. H. Leonard is Dead", *Weekly Town Talk*, October 27, 1917.

³⁵⁰ "Penitentiary Lease", *The Times-Picayune*, April 17, 1894.

Later in 1894, Act 114 was repealed in favor of Act 134, which formally permitted lessees to employ and sublet convicts on farms and plantations. Meanwhile, the legislature adopted a resolution to prohibit convict leasing. Governor Murphy Foster, an opponent of convict leasing, had pushed legislation against it as early as 1892 “for reasons of political security and retaliation”. Indeed, Foster was concerned that the institution had become a source of divisive debate within the Democratic Party in Louisiana. However, the resolution to end convict leasing was only to take effect at the end of the James’ contract in 1901³⁵¹. It nonetheless allowed for “convict labor” under state control for public roads, farms, levees and other public works, once again putting financial interests above concerns over competition with free laborers and humanitarian concern for prisoners’ conditions³⁵². James would die three weeks after the passage of this resolution³⁵³. His son, Samuel Lawrence James Jr., continued to operate the lease for the management of Louisiana state prisoners. Adopted in 1898, the new Louisiana state constitution would confirm the abolition of convict leasing after the end of the lease in 1901.

Not unlike his father, Samuel Lawrence James Jr., belonged to Louisiana elite circles and was highly regarded within them. According to the press, his “genealogy dates back to Alfred the Great. His pedigree extends in an unbroken line for 1000 years. Colonel James’ revolution ancestor was Major Ed Hall, who commanded the First Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers”. Consequently, his membership in the Louisiana Branch of the hereditary society the Sons of the Revolution was “returned with the highest endorsement and approval of the general secretary”³⁵⁴. Samuel Lawrence James Jr. was often called “Colonel James” although he apparently did not have a right to this title. At his death in 1932, he was described as a “prominent man” who “made his living betting on [horse] races”. Meeting with success and setbacks, he was said to have been a millionaire “half a dozen times” but to have died “broke”. His way of life might very well have been what caused him to sell the Angola plantation to the state of Louisiana, since according to the press, “he lost all the money he possessed and was compelled to put a big “plaster”

³⁵¹ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 74.

³⁵² Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, chap. 3.

³⁵³ “Col. S. L. James”, *The New Orleans Item*, July 27, 1894.

³⁵⁴ “Sons Of The Revolution Elect Delegates to the National Convention”, *The Times-Picayune*, April 22, 1894.

(mortgage) on his plantation”³⁵⁵. This story contrasts with what his daughter, Cecil James Shilstone, claimed in her memoirs. She asserted that the property was heavily mortgaged because of her grandfather’s sumptuous level of expenditure and “extravagances”, rather than her father’s gambling habit³⁵⁶. According to the estate of Samuel Lawrence James Sr, between 1895 and 1899 the executors of his personal estate collected and disbursed more than 2.3 million dollars, quite a “monumental sum in economically depressed Louisiana during the 1890s”³⁵⁷.

It is impossible to assess how much of this fortune was acquired through state prisoners’ sweat and blood. Men like Samuel James did not demonstrate many qualms about the means they adopted to achieve profit. At the National Conference of Charities in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1883, another “southern man” declared coldly: “Before the war we owned the negroes. If a man had a good negro, he could afford to take care of him: if he was sick, get a doctor. He might even get gold plugs in his teeth. But these convicts, we don’t own ’em. One dies, get another”³⁵⁸. With this attitude prevailing after the Civil War among the people involved “in the business of convicts”, it is not surprising that the convict leasing system resulted in a tremendously high mortality rate in Southern states. In 1883, a study disclosed the fact that only four prisons south of the Ohio river had a record of less than 50 deaths per 1,000 prisoners (Louisiana exceeded one in ten according to the study), while only four prisons north of the Ohio river had a mortality rate greater than 25 per 1,000. North of the thirty-ninth parallel the average death rate of 28 prisons was 14.9 per thousand, south of the line there was an average mortality of 41.3 per thousand. The same study revealed that everywhere in the South, sentences were unreasonably long (for instance, out of 1,200 prisoners in Georgia in 1880 only 150 had terms as short as three years, and over 500 had terms of ten years or more)³⁵⁹.

In Louisiana, at the end of the 19th century, the horrific detention and labor conditions imposed by the lessee on state prisoners resulted in a high death rate. This was especially the case for the

³⁵⁵ “Colonel James, Southern Gentleman”, *The Times-Picayune*, September 4, 1932.

³⁵⁶ Cecile James Shilstone, *My Plantation Days, The Memoirs of Cecile James Shilstone, 1887-1979* (1947), Manuscript on file at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola Museum, Angola, 5. Courtesy of Burk Foster.

³⁵⁷ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 76.

³⁵⁸ National Conference of Charities, Proceedings (1883), quoted in Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 45.

³⁵⁹ Quoted in: McKelvey, “Penal Slavery and Southern Reconstruction”, 174.

Black men toiling in levee camps along both sides of the Mississippi river. For instance, a 3,000 feet-long levee containing over 30,000 cubic yards was expected to be completed in a month by a labor force of only 131 men. This construction above Waterloo, Louisiana, was intended to protect at least two private properties along the Mississippi in Pointe Coupee parish³⁶⁰. Through the lease, the state of Louisiana was thereby supporting private planters by means of prisoners' coerced labor. Constantly working in the mud to construct and maintain levees, they had only plows, mules and wheelbarrows to accompany their physical efforts in these Herculean tasks³⁶¹. Incidentally, a picture taken at Angola reveals that, in the early 1940s, the wheelbarrow was still Black male prisoners' main tool for levee building, suggesting that not much had changed in their working conditions since the convict leasing period³⁶².

Samuel Lawrence James Sr. and his heirs kept control over state prisoners during a total of thirty-one years. Over this period, up to three thousand people (mostly Black men) might have died because of overwork, brutal punishment and squalid conditions favorable to the spread of infectious disease³⁶³. Indeed, reports issued by the Board of Control indicate that an average of about a hundred persons died annually between 1883 and 1901. In 1896 alone, 216 prisoners died, the equivalent of twenty percent³⁶⁴. It seems that things got worse after the Major's death, since during a four-year period prisoners under Samuel Lawrence James Jr.'s regime died at "an average yearly death rate of 100 in the thousand", amounting to "a greater per cent of its inmates than the regiments on the battle line in our Civil War, either Federal or Confederate"³⁶⁵. Under the convict leasing system, state prisoners "died in the fields or in the swamps building levees, in North Louisiana lumber camps, or on railroad crews"³⁶⁶.

³⁶⁰ *Pointe Coupee Democrat*, June 4, 1892.

³⁶¹ Cardon, "'Less Than Mayhem': Louisiana's Convict Lease, 1865-1901", 419.

³⁶² "Hell on Angola", *The New Orleans Item*, July 16, 1943.

³⁶³ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 46.

³⁶⁴ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 77.

³⁶⁵ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 38.

³⁶⁶ "Death is No Escape for Angola Inmates", *The Times-Picayune*, October 14, 1990.

When the horrendous conditions imposed on state prisoners became the focus of public attention, the individuals involved in the Louisiana penal system tried to distance themselves from the lessee's management by denying any responsibility for this hecatomb. For instance, defense lawyer and former District Attorney Joseph Ransdell (who would later become a U.S. senator) stated in court:

Gentlemen, it is true that I prosecuted these unfortunate men, but I was merely doing my duty, and I am in no way responsible for the horrible manner in which the penitentiary is kept [...] A gentleman told me that in 1885 or 1886, he saw 42 convicts buried at one camp, on the Pecan Grove levee, and the death[s] were nearly all caused by overwork, exposure and brutality³⁶⁷.

In a convenient re-reading of history obliterating the fact that the Louisiana system had existed antebellum and had been run since 1868 by a former Confederate officer, 20th century penitentiary officials even tried to recast convict leasing as an invention of the northern states. In one of the institution's biennial reports, it is stated that: "The lease system was one of the damnable outgrowths of the Civil War. It was the spawn of the carpetbag era. It was a blot upon the State for which our fathers were not responsible"³⁶⁸. Most presumably, James managed to stay the sole lessee of LSP operations thanks to bribery and his personal ties to politicians³⁶⁹.

Throughout the South, convict leasing reduced prisoners to commodities. Several scholars have suggested comparisons with chattel slavery or even defended the theory of a direct filiation between the two systems, calling this carceral regime "neo-slavery" or "slavery by another name"³⁷⁰. By doing so, these authors made their own the argument of Frederick Douglass, George Washington Cable and W.E.B. DuBois, who were contemporaries of the convict leasing system and bore witness to the conditions of the incarcerated³⁷¹. But slavery was not the only analogy that was made. In 1891, after fourteen years' experience in charge of convict camps in

³⁶⁷ Address in trial in East Carroll parish, circa 1898, Mss 1127, 1349, Box 1, Folder 1-b, Joseph Ransdell papers, LLMVC.

³⁶⁸ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 37.

³⁶⁹ Carleton, "Politics and Punishment", 213.

³⁷⁰ James, "Introduction"; Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*.

³⁷¹ See for instance Cable, *The Silent South, Together with the Freedman's Case in Equity and the Convict Lease System*.

Florida, Captain J.C. Powell compared convict leasing to tsarist camps in Siberia and argued that it was: “difficult to get a white man there, unless he committed some very heinous crime”³⁷². In the aftermath of WWII, Fletcher Melvin Green, author of another essay entitled “Some Aspects of the Convict Lease System in the Southern States”, even made a comparison with Nazi Germany concentration camps³⁷³.

In Louisiana and elsewhere, convict leasing was a penal innovation capable of raking huge monetary profits. Washing their hands of the plight of prisoners, southern states left the field wide open for private companies to put in place the managerial organization necessary to “harness” Black labor³⁷⁴. As historian Alex Lichtenstein argued convincingly: “convict labor made modern economic development of the South’s resources compatible with the maintenance of racial domination”³⁷⁵. Louisiana was no exception. With Samuel James and later his son assuming control of the penitentiary operations, prisoners contributed notably to the construction of railroads, and to the lumber industry, in addition to playing a major role in levee building and plantation work in the pelican state.

³⁷² Powell, *The American Siberia or Fourteen Years’ Experience in a Southern Convict Camp* (1891), quoted in: Carter, “Prisons, Politics and Business : The Convict Lease System in the Post-Civil War South”, 54.

³⁷³ Green, *Essays in Southern History*.

³⁷⁴ Since Texas opened its first private prison in 1985, the industrial carceral complex has developed in the U.S. to become a major player in twenty-eight states and in federal prisons. In 2015, 126 272 individuals were confined in private prisons, the equivalent of eight percent of the federal and state carceral population (i.e. an increase by forty-five percent since 2000). Together Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Florida, and Georgia held 3,000 of their prisoners in private prisons. The main companies operating prisons or providing resources to prisons are: GEO Group, Core Civic (formerly Corrections Corporation of America), and Management and Training Corporation. Source: The Sentencing Project, *Fact Sheet: Private Prisons in the United States*, 2017.

³⁷⁵ Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*, 5.

3.3 Restoring State Administration

Prison reformers (such as Frederick S. Shields from the Prison Reform Association based in New Orleans) claimed credit for ending the convict leasing system in Louisiana, although motives for the state of Louisiana to take over penitentiary operations were mostly political and financial. When Governor Foster's resolution finally came into effect in 1901, the old Baton Rouge penitentiary was in disrepair: a tornado had blown down a portion of the "Walls" in the summer of 1891, claiming ten victims among the prisoners³⁷⁶. Deemed irreparable, the penitentiary could not serve its purpose. State prisoners were then mostly housed in various labor camps across the State. In 1901, out of a total of 1,014 incarcerated individuals, only 128 were in the Baton Rouge penitentiary: these were mostly white men assigned to the tailor shop, some women assigned to the laundry and maintenance of the prison, and prisoners cared for at the prison hospital. The remainder of the carceral population - the Black prisoners who constituted 85 percent of state prisoners - continued to work on plantations, roads, and levees, as they had done under the convict leasing system³⁷⁷. In fact, the purchase of Angola plantation for \$200,000 (as well as other plantations in West Feliciana parish and in neighboring parishes) clearly indicates that the state of Louisiana had decided to make as much profit as the lessee used to, by coercing prisoners to labor³⁷⁸. The dominant opinion was that: "Many prisoners had worked at Angola prior to its sale and it was perfectly natural that it be converted into a penal farm when the state acquired it"³⁷⁹. Indeed, these plantations would form the baseline of the penal agro-business of the state.

The absence of rehabilitation objectives went hand in hand with the pursuit of financial profit. It was also justified by white supremacist views of the carceral population. In one of their biennial reports, the Board of Control authorities stated:

³⁷⁶ United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, "Archaeological Data Recovery at Angola Plantation, Sites 16WF121 and 16WF122 West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana", 100.

³⁷⁷ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 45.

³⁷⁸ "Convict Farmers of Louisiana", *Daily States*, July 14, 1901.

³⁷⁹ Mrs. Herbert M. Shilstone, Samuel Lawrence James Jr.'s daughter who grew up at Angola up to the age of 14, quoted in: "Angola Occupied by the Shilstone Clan", *The Times-Picayune*, May 13, 1975.

The same regulations that might work out well in northern states, where white men only are to be considered, cannot be applied here [where the majority of prisoners are black]. I need scarcely dwell upon this point at any length I addressing the General Assembly of this State, where the vices and defects of the negro race are so well known. It is not for a moment to be contended that the negro is not entitled to kind and humane treatment, but he cannot be governed and controlled by the same method as the whites, nor can he be improved and elevated on the same lines³⁸⁰.

In short, “Louisiana picked up where the lessees left off as officials acquired and then expanded ready-made levee prison camps and a penal plantation”³⁸¹. During the same years that the convict leasing system was abolished, the state of Louisiana also adopted disenfranchisement legislation in order to reduce the political power of African Americans and poor whites³⁸². The expansion of state-building projects such as the penal farm at Angola was part of the same efforts to disenfranchise African Americans and keep them at the bottom of the social ladder.

Even some of the personnel responsible for overseeing prisoner labor remained the same after the state had taken over LSP operations. For instance, Edward White, last manager of the system under the lease, was one of the three members of the Board of Control. Warden W.M. Reynaud had also held this position with Samuel James. The two plantation managers at Angola were carryovers from the convict leasing regime. One of them was S. L. James himself, who was said to have “made a striking success of cotton planting”³⁸³.

Considering these continuities, the claims of progress ring hollow. Only a few days after the end of the lease, officials already claimed that: “They [prisoners] are no longer treated as animals, but as human beings, in whom there yet remains some good which might be developed, and the convict yet become a good and useful citizen”³⁸⁴. The news of “a revolution in the method of handling negro convict labor” went around the country, with advocates always contrasting the

³⁸⁰ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 17-18.

³⁸¹ Hermann, “Specters of Freedom”, 372.

³⁸² Carleton, “The Movement to End the Convict-Lease System in Louisiana”, 218–20.

³⁸³ “Final Details”, *Daily Advocate*, January 1, 1901.

³⁸⁴ “Changes in the Convict System”, *The Daily Picayune*, January 9, 1901.

cruelty of the previous carceral regime with the new enlightened regime³⁸⁵. “The State of Louisiana leads the Union in the scientific and humane treatment of convict labor”, claimed the Board after only a few months. However, in the same article, the so-called “humane treatment” was described in more details: “each guard is equipped with a sinister looking Winchester rifle”, and “the strap [...] has occasionally be used on refractory prisoners”³⁸⁶. The first annual report following the end of the convict leasing is a good example of the denial by penitentiary authorities of the reality of prisoners’ lived experiences in captivity. It is filled with photographs positively representing Angola farm as well as the other state penal installations. For instance, the staged photograph captioned “Fun in Levee Camp, Atchafalaya River” represents Black men dressed in clean prison uniforms, one playing the fiddle while the other ones are dancing. This photograph served to cover up the harsh realities of coerced labor in levee camps where prisoners spent most of their days in mud carrying soil in wheelbarrows³⁸⁷.

Already in the first year of state operations at Angola, forty Black women “cause more trouble to the keepers than all the men put together”. Captain White, in charge of the women’s camp, guarded them with a revolver and a strap, “which latter is very much in need, though not applied often”³⁸⁸. It seems that the women complained to the Board about food and hygiene, but their complaints were quickly dismissed³⁸⁹. The following chapters will address the legitimacy of these grievances and talk about the “troubles” caused by these female prisoners. However, before getting into the outcomes of this research on Black women’s experiences at Angola, a contextual setting is necessary.

³⁸⁵ “Convict System Changed in the South”, *Chicago Tribune*, August 3, 1901.

³⁸⁶ “Convict Farmers of Louisiana”, *Daily States*, July 14, 1901.

³⁸⁷ Photograph by Andrew D. Lytle in Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC.

³⁸⁸ “The New Century in the State’s Convict System”, *The Times-Picayune*, July 14, 1901.

³⁸⁹ “Convict Farmers of Louisiana”, *Daily States*, July 14, 1901.

3.4 Statistical Portrait of the Carceral State during Jim Crow

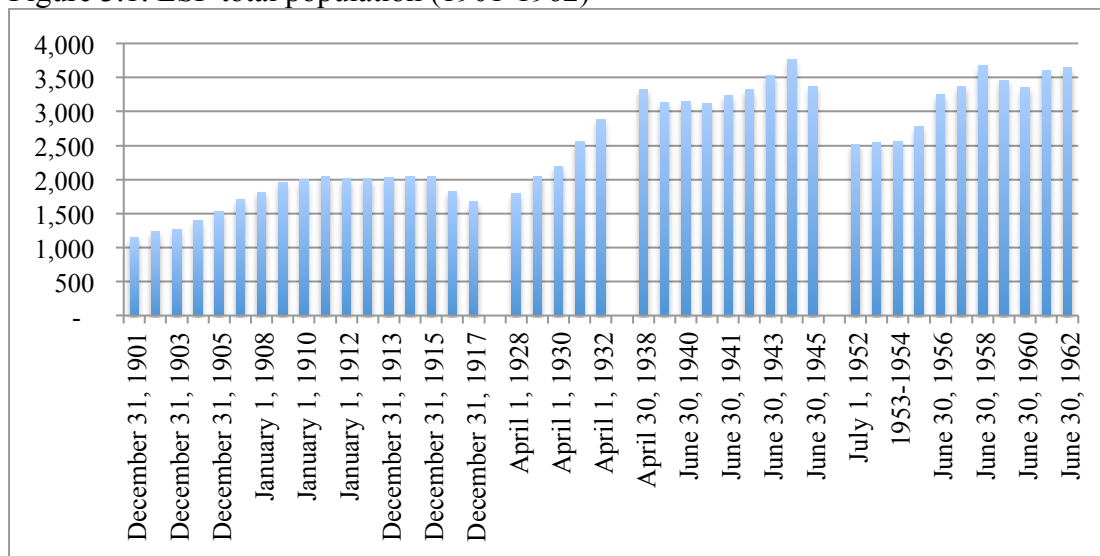
Most of the statistics presented here were found in penitentiary annual or biennial reports. They compile admissions in some cases and at others present numbers of the population on record at a particular moment (usually the end of the fiscal year), making comparisons over the whole period impossible. Some federal studies on prison population were also collected for the purpose of situating Louisiana within the southern region as well as nationally. Altogether, the numbers displayed in this chapter still provide an insightful, if incomplete, statistical picture of the Louisiana State Penitentiary population during the studied period, 1901-1961.

Below is a figure representing the numbers of prisoners present in the penitentiary population at different moments over the period 1901-1962, usually at the end of the fiscal year. This is the result of a compilation of numbers presented in several annual, biennial or statistical reports produced by penitentiary officials. Despite missing years, some trends appear. The increase of the LSP population was interrupted by World War I and World War II (which also contributed to the depletion of the Black population by outmigration from the state), but was accelerated by the Great Depression. The increase in the carceral population was challenging for penitentiary officials, who had to manage the overcrowding of the facilities, and tried to secure state funding to increase their capacity. Several construction projects were undertaken at Angola, while several others were abandoned, such as a Works Progress Administration project using free laborers to build a new camp to house eight hundred male prisoners³⁹⁰. By comparison, the prison population at Parchman, Mississippi, a penal farm often compared to Angola, increased by 20% per year during the Depression years, while the Great Depression impacted negatively the prison budget, rendering the conditions worse for the incarcerated³⁹¹.

³⁹⁰ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 10.

³⁹¹ Cox, *Goat Castle*, 163.

Figure 3.1: LSP total population (1901-1962)³⁹²



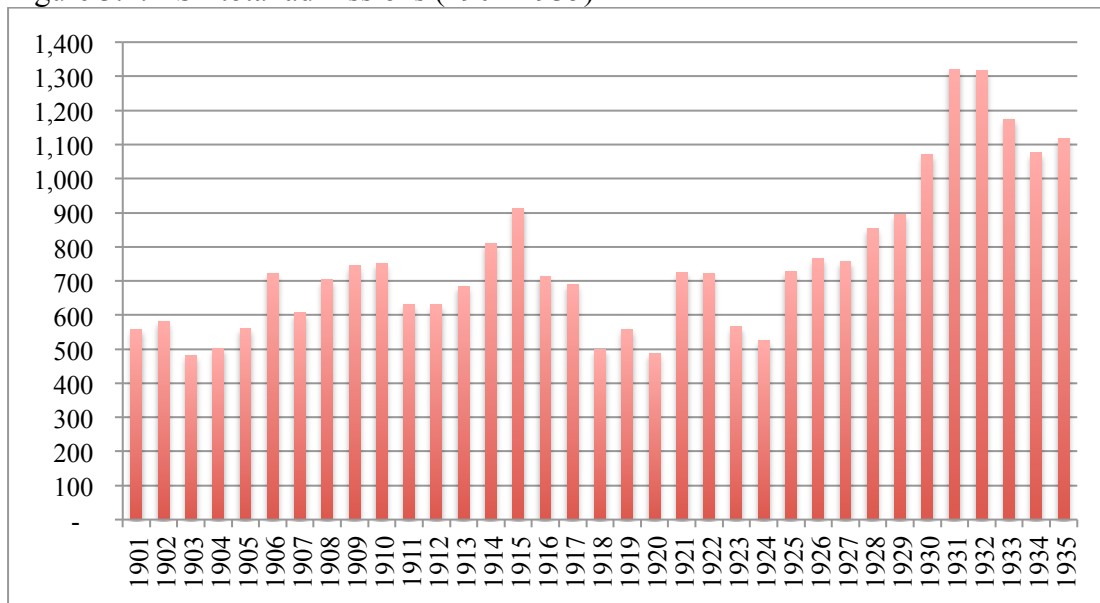
Sources: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901; Biennial Report Calendar Years 1902-1903; Biennial Report 1904-1905; Biennial Report Calendar Years 1906-1907; Biennial report Calendar Years 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1908-1909; Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911; Biennial report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans; Report made by Hy. L. Fuqua, General Manager of the State Penitentiary to the Governor and General Assembly of Louisiana for the Regular Session of 1918 Covering the Biennial Period of 1916 and 1917, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Report to His Excellency, The Honorable O.K. Allen Governor of Louisiana and to The Honorable Senators and Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana, May 1932, Call number 365.3 La, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans; Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936; Biennial Report 1936-1938; Biennial Report 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLCVM; Report of the Department of Institutions of the State of Louisiana for the year October 1940-1941, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888r, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans (hereafter LARC); State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Biennium Report for the period ending June 30, 1942, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM; Annual Report of Department of Institutions, State of Louisiana, Fiscal year ending June 30, 1943, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888r, LARC; Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1943-1944, State of Louisiana, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1944, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM; Louisiana Institutions, Annual Report 1944-1945, State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM; Statistical Report of the Louisiana Department of Institutions, 1952-1953, Call Number HV86.L852, LLCVM; Louisiana Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1955-56; Annual Statistical Report 1956-57; Annual Statistical Report 1957-58, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888s, LARC; Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1958-59, Call Number LaRm HV86.L852, Louisiana Room, University of Louisiana in Lafayette; Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1959-60, Call Number HV86.L852, LLCVM; State of Louisiana, Department

³⁹² See Appendix D table D.1: LSP population by year.

of Institutions, Annual Report 1960-61; Annual Report 1961-1962, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM.

Two factors contribute directly to the fluctuations in the incarcerated population observed above: the length of sentences and the flow of admissions, both of which are outcomes of the judicial sentences determined in parish criminal courts (and marginally at the Louisiana Supreme Court). Observations on women's sentences will be presented and discussed in chapter 6. Unfortunately, official reports do not offer systematic data concerning sentences for the penitentiary population as a whole. However, penitentiary admissions were deduced from LSP records for the period 1901-1935 and are presented in the figure below, which clearly shows the impact of World War I and the Great Depression. A total of 26,449 individuals were admitted to the State penitentiary over the period, i.e. the equivalent of the entire population of Shreveport in 1910³⁹³.

Figure 3.2: LSP total admissions (1901-1935)



Source: LSP collection

Penitentiary officials acknowledged the yearly fluctuations in admissions, and recognized that:

³⁹³ Black novelist Chester Himes touched this topic in a dialogue between two of his fictional characters in prison: "So many men have come in since I have. Let's see, nine thousand and three hundred men have come in between you and me. That's a whole city of men. That's as many men as there are in a whole lot of little towns". Himes, *Yesterday Will Make You Cry*, 42.

[admissions] have very closely corresponded to the amount of general unemployment. This has been particularly true for white inmates. It is believed that unemployment brings not only economic distress but also contributes to idleness and feelings of uselessness which contribute to conduct likely to lead to penitentiary commitment³⁹⁴.

Despite this realization, they denied the systemic impact of unemployment on criminality. Rather, authorities insisted on characterizing it both as a personal choice and an individual problem: “Probably, no economic event can properly be considered a cause of a crime; more likely, it is the particular individual’s ability to adjust psychologically to a frustrating economic situation which ultimately determines whether he violates the legal code”³⁹⁵. Officials also recognized the impact of major external events on incarceration:

[...] Penitentiary admissions are more subject to wartime fluctuations than are other State institutions. During the year 1944 admissions dropped 36% from 1940. During the Korean War of 1952, admissions dropped 18% over 1950. Some of the younger men who might have gotten into trouble with the law, were in service instead³⁹⁶.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the effect of World War II on the penitentiary population was amplified both by fewer admissions and by more discharges³⁹⁷. This suggests that, by increasing the flow of penitentiary discharges over the war years, Louisiana officials made sure that the men who had gotten “in trouble with the law” before the war could also participate in the war effort. The following correspondence from the penitentiary General Manager signals that penitentiary officials were proactive in adjusting the carceral population to the needs for labor inside and outside penitentiary grounds:

It has been a policy of this office to recommend early in the year reprieves for farm laborers who qualify by the usual standards of reprieve except in that they may be a few weeks short of the one-third rule. It is deemed better public policy to let them get started with their crops in January than to send them home later in the year handicapped by a late start³⁹⁸.

³⁹⁴ Statistics on carceral population, undated. Correspondence Ed Grant Department of Institutions, P1981-495, Folder September-December 1955, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

³⁹⁵ Division of Research, Department of Institutions, State of Louisiana, *Trends in Admission to Louisiana State Penitentiary, Research Report No.2*, Department of Institutions, Baton Rouge, June 1956, Vertical Files, LARC.

³⁹⁶ Statistics on carceral population, undated, Folder September-December 1955, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Ed Grant Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

³⁹⁷ Louisiana Institutions, Annual Report 1944-1945, State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM.

³⁹⁸ Letter of recommendation Pardon from R.L. Himes, General Manager to Governor O.K. Allen, 8 January 1936, Box 12, Collection P1975-021, Pardons 1892-1940, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

The practice was so common that the General Manager used the term ‘farm reprieve’ routinely in his correspondence³⁹⁹. White employers would write to penitentiary officials to get their laborers back on their farm in time for the harvest. Occasionally, they were the very same employers who had been the prosecutors in the cases leading to the worker’s incarceration. This concerned Black men and occasionally Black female prisoners (see chapter 6 section 6.2.3).

Statistics collected by the federal Bureau of Justice show a major trend in the long-term growth in the size and proportion of the Black prison population at the national level. In 1926, Black prison admissions constituted 21 percent of total state and federal prison admissions, and 32 percent in 1960. These rates were respectively 13 percent and 25 percent for federal admissions, and 23 percent and 34 percent of state admissions. Over the period 1926-1960, the total admissions in federal and state prisons had doubled (from 43,328 to 84,068 individuals). However, this increase was not constant: there was acceleration during the Great Depression (with a pick at 64,265 in 1938), then a drop during World War II, and another acceleration after the war.

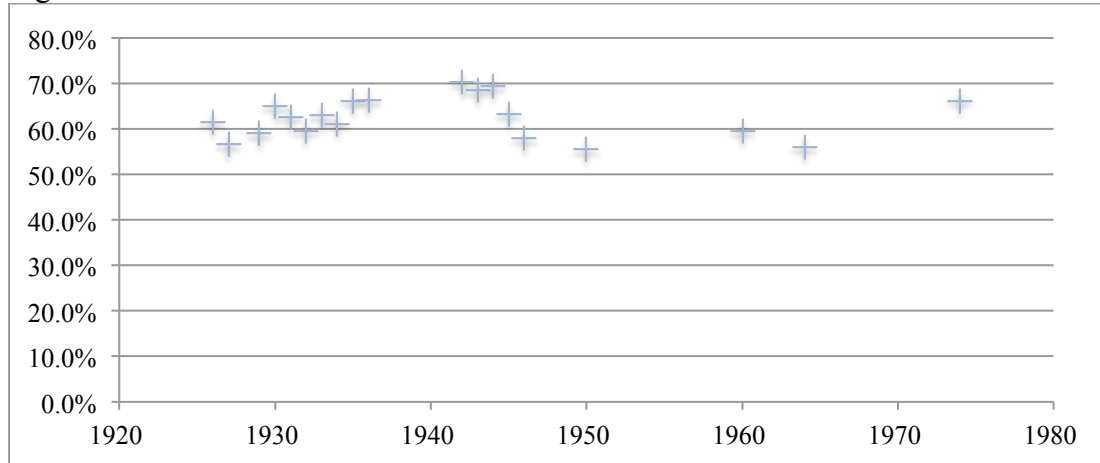
The profile of southern states was very different from that of northern or western states. In 1926, an estimated 45 percent of all persons admitted to state prisons in the South were Black. That same year, Louisiana reported to the Federal Department of Justice 765 admissions, including 471 concerning Black individuals (i.e. 61.6 percent), which largely exceeded even the average southern rate of Black admissions⁴⁰⁰.

³⁹⁹ Several letters of recommendation from R.L. Himes, General Manager to Governor O.K. Allen mention that: “the case is within the requirements for farm reprieves”. See Box 12, Collection P1975-021, Pardons 1892-1940, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁴⁰⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Race of Prisoners Admitted to State and Federal Institutions, 1926-86*, May 1991, 5, 8, 10. According to this publication, the Federal Government began keeping detailed annual records on prison admissions in 1926. The following years have no admission statistics, published or unpublished: 1951 through 1959, 1961, 1963, 1965 through 1969, and 1971 through 1973. For 1928, 1937 through 1941, 1947 through 1949, and 1981, no state-by-state admission statistics on prisoner race exist. From 1937 to 1941 the combined state and federal prison admission statistics on prisoner race include both men and women, but the only existing state-by-state data on the race of admitted prisoners are the published statistics on males. From 1947 to 1949, available racial statistics are for males only. There has never been a year in which the Federal Government fully succeeded in collecting information on the race of every person admitted to prison from court.

The figure below presents Black incarceration rates in Louisiana over the period 1926-1974, showing that they oscillate between 55 percent and 70 percent.

Figure 3.3: Black admission rates in Louisiana State carceral institutions 1926-1974



Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics⁴⁰¹

Considering the racial composition of the Louisiana state general population over the period presented in the table below, there is a clear over-representation of Black people among the Louisiana prison population, which suggests racial biases in arrests and convictions (this dissertation addresses the matter of racial sentencing in chapter 6 in particular).

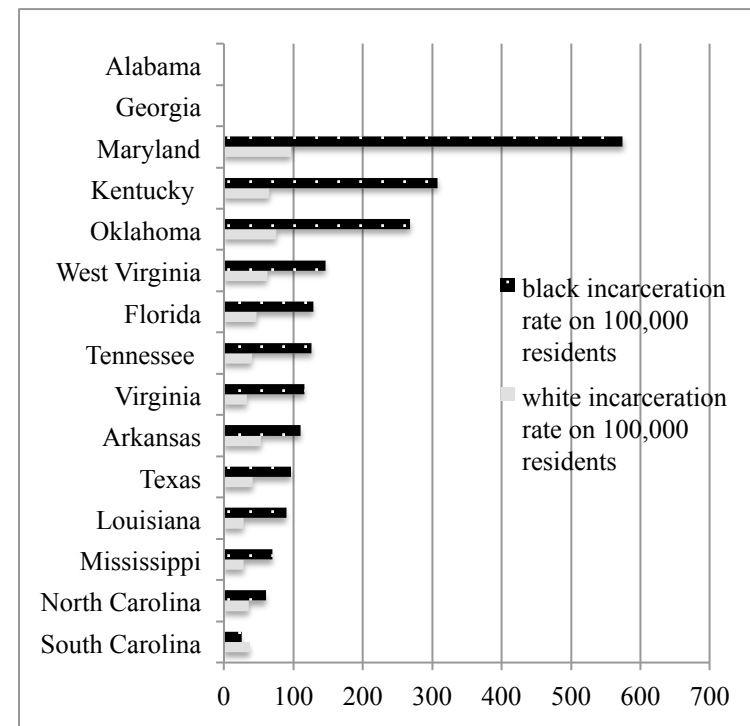
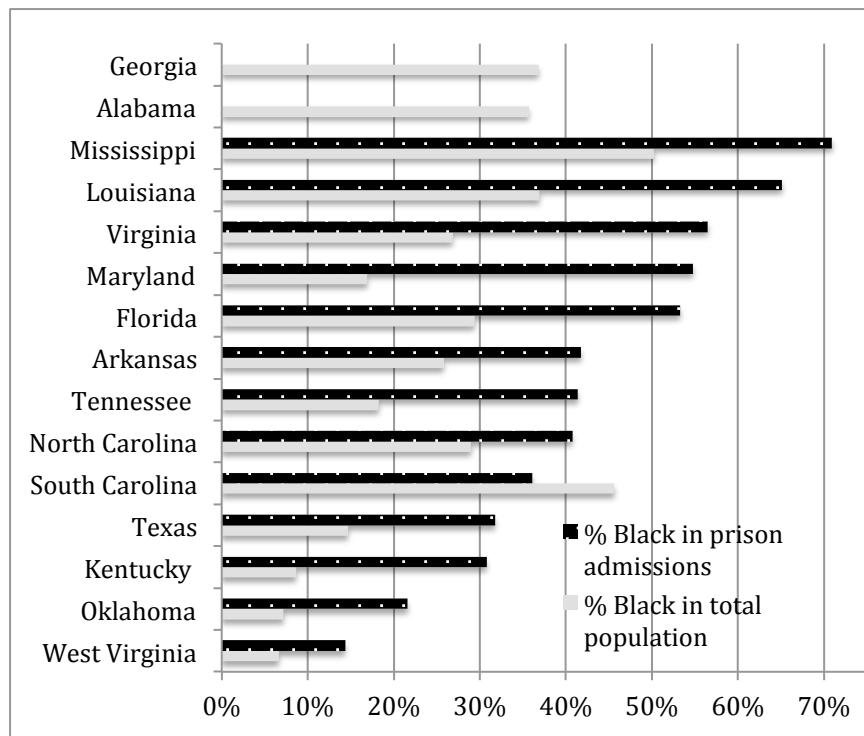
⁴⁰¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Race of Prisoners Admitted to State and Federal Institutions, 1926-86*, May 1991, 10-55. A detailed table is presented in Appendix F (table F.1).

Table 3.1: Louisiana general population by race according to U.S. Census

Census Year	Black	White	Total	% Black
1880	483,655	454,054	939,046	51.5%
1890	559,198	559,389	1,118,587	50.0%
1900	650,804	730,821	1,381,625	47.1%
1910	713,874	941,086	1,656,388	43.1%
1920	700,257	1,096,611	1,798,318	38.9%
1930	776,326	1,318,160	2,101,593	36.9%
1940	849,303	1,511,739	2,363,880	35.9%
1950	882,428	1,796,683	2,683,516	32.9%
1960	1,039,207	2,211,715	3,257,022	31.9%

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1900* ; U. S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1940* ; U. S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1970* ;U. S. Department of Commerce and Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, 1st ed., vol. 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932).

The following figures represent Black admissions to southern state prisons and reformatories in relation to their general population. They also compare Black and white incarceration rates (local and parish / county jails excluded) for the census years 1930, 1950 and 1960 (the only years when prisoners admissions were available on a state-by-state basis). For each year, the two sets of figures complement each other to offer a clear picture of racial composition.

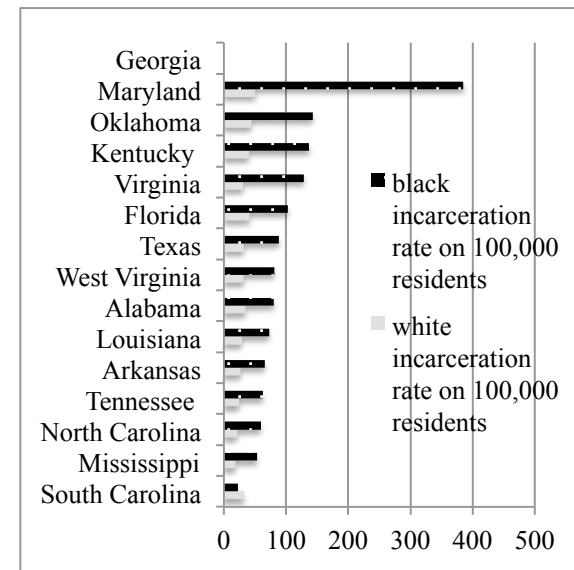
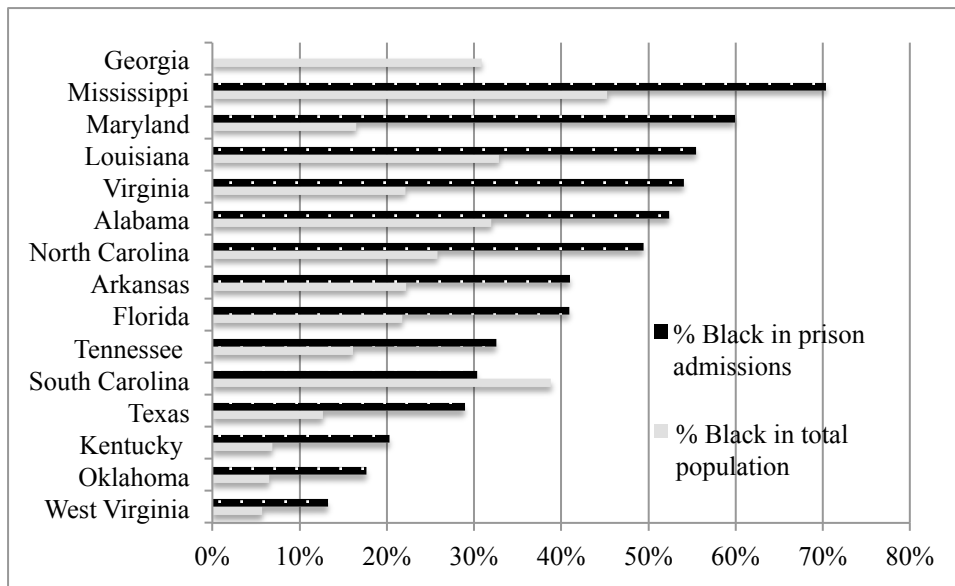


(Left) Figure 3.4: 1930 Black admission rates in state carceral institutions compared to Black percentage of the general population

(Right) Figure 3.5: 1930 Black incarceration rate in state carceral institutions compared to white incarceration rate per 100,000 residents

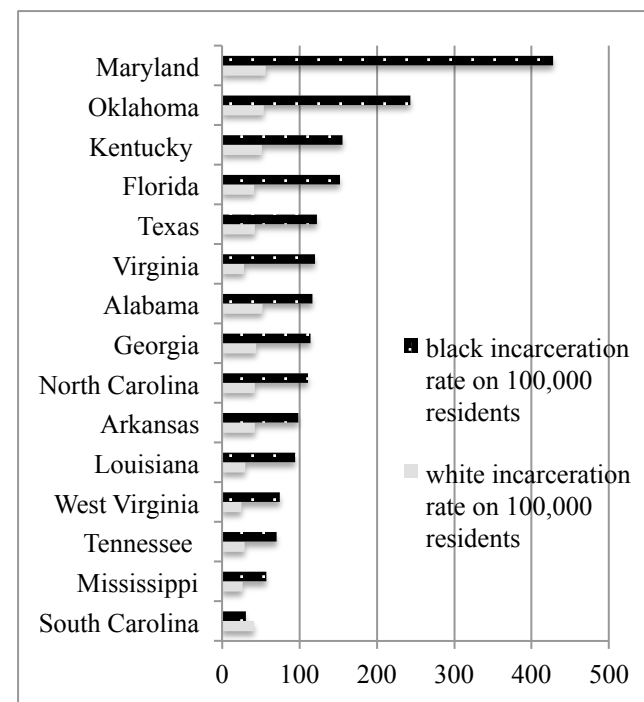
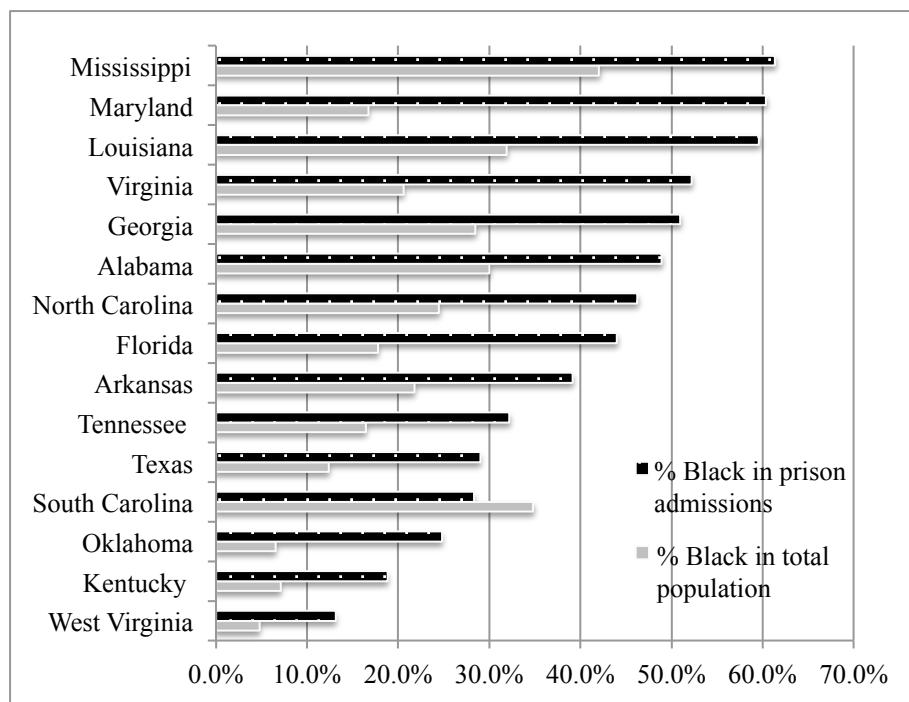
Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Race of Prisoners Admitted to State and Federal Institutions, 1926-86*, May 1991, p. 14 ; U. S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1970*.

(note: 1930 numbers for Louisiana correspond to the admissions to LSP)



(Left) Figure 3.6: 1950 Black admission rates in state carceral institutions compared to Black percentage of the general population
 (Right) Figure 3.7: 1950 Black incarceration rate in state carceral institutions compared to white incarceration rate per 100,000 residents

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Race of Prisoners Admitted to State and Federal Institutions, 1926-86*, May 1991, p. 28 ; U. S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1970*.



(Left) Figure 3.8: 1960 Black admission rates in state carceral institutions compared to Black percentage of the general population

(Right) Figure 3.9: 1960 Black incarceration rate in state carceral institutions compared to white incarceration rate per 100,000 residents

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Race of Prisoners Admitted to State and Federal Institutions, 1926-86*, May 1991, p. 29 ; U. S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1970*.

According to this federal data, in 1930 Louisiana had the second highest percentage of Black prisoners among southern states (65.1 percent) behind only Mississippi (70.9 percent). In 1930, Louisiana had a rate of Black incarceration of 90 per 100,000 residents (3.2 times greater than the white incarceration rate), showing patterns of over-representation. However, African Americans' disproportionate presence in the carceral system was even higher in Maryland, where the Black incarceration rate was of 575 per 100,000 residents (5.9 times more than the white incarceration rate). In 1950 and 1960, Louisiana had the third highest percentage of Black prisoners among southern states (respectively 55.5 percent and 59.6 percent) with Black incarceration rates of respectively 73 and 95 per 100,000 residents (2.5 and 3.1 times more than the white incarceration rate). In this later period, Louisiana was still far behind Maryland's rates, in which Black people were 7.6 more likely to be incarcerated than whites⁴⁰². No breakdown by gender was available.

LSP population grew by 300 percent over the 6 first decades of the 20th century. Statistics show a constant over-representation of Black individuals among the incarcerated, inasmuch as about two thirds of the State prisoners were Black. It is noteworthy that members of Louisiana's Black population were three times more likely to be incarcerated than its white population. However, this ratio was far behind some other southern states' Black incarceration rate, for instance in Maryland where African Americans were six to seven times more likely to be incarcerated than whites.

Statistics on LSP female population are presented in detail in following chapters and in appendixes. Drawn from my database built from penitentiary records, they encompass the period 1901-1935, and represent a profile of the female admissions at the penitentiary. Women represented around 4 percent of the penitentiary admissions during the period studied, and a similar percentage of the penitentiary population (see chapter 4). The size of the female population at LSP was comprised of between 30 and 224 individuals over the six-decade period, during which time about 2,000 women in total were sentenced to the penitentiary. Among women, Black over-representation was even more pronounced, since over the period 1901-1935,

⁴⁰² U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Race of Prisoners Admitted to State and Federal Institutions, 1926-86*, May 1991, 14, 28, 29; U. S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1970*.

91 percent of female admissions were African American women. About two-thirds of Black female admissions were related to convictions for crimes against persons, another third to convictions for crimes against property, and a limited number for crimes against persons and property, crimes against public morality and other crimes. Young women were over-represented in the carceral population. Black women were incarcerated at younger ages than their white counterparts: the average age of women admitted to LSP being 25 years old for Black women and 29 for white ones (see chapter 8). Forty percent of the Black women admitted from 1901 to 1935 were 21 years old or younger. Among Angola prisoners, Black women were more likely than their white counterparts to be single, although the proportion of single Black women decreased over time. Single women were significantly more represented among women convicted of property crime, while married women were significantly more represented among those convicted of crime against persons (see Appendix B). Although no exhaustive data exist on the case leading to their convictions, many were charged with the killing of their male intimate partner⁴⁰³. Literacy rates among Black women were lower than for their white counterparts, but show a progression between successive birth cohorts (see chapter 6). Eighty percent of the Black women admitted from 1901 to 1935 were born in Louisiana (and among them, the same proportion had both parents born in Louisiana as well) and the rest in other Southern States. Conversely, white women came from more diverse birthplaces and only half were Louisiana-born (see Appendix C). Altogether, Orleans, Caddo, East Baton Rouge, Ouachita, and Madison parishes counted for more than a third of Black female convictions to LSP⁴⁰⁴. The most prominent occupation prior to incarceration was domestic labor, both for Black and white women, indicating that most of the female prisoners belonged to the working-class (see chapter 7).

⁴⁰³ On the subject of domestic homicide, see: Adler, *Murder in New Orleans*, chap. 2.

⁴⁰⁴ It seems logical that the four first parishes convicted a large proportion of the prisoners since the main cities of New Orleans, Shreveport, Baton Rouge and Monroe were located in these parishes. However, the case of Madison parish is more difficult to interpret since it was a rural parish. The demographics of the parish population and power structures might have something to do with it. Indeed, antebellum, Madison parish was one of the Mississippi cotton parishes with the largest number of slaveholders with 50 or more enslaved individuals working on their plantations and had one of the highest percentage of enslaved population in Louisiana, with 88.3 percent of its population unfree in the 1860 U.S. Census. Source: Menn, *The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana – 1860*. Madison parish had the same sheriff for 40 years during Jim Crow, Andrew Jackson Sevier, who probably had a great influence on arrests and convictions of the Black population. Source: “Madison Loses Dean of Peace Officers”, *The Madison Journal*, August 29. 1941.

Conclusion of chapter 3

Financial and racial concerns were at the heart of the development of Louisiana's carceral system, and more particularly its state penitentiary. In its early decades, the state of Louisiana refused to take charge of its prisoners. Walking away from the penitentiary operations, the state left to private entrepreneurs to assume the daily management of the prisoners. However, realizing that these unscrupulous businessmen were making fortune out of prisoners' coerced labor, the state took over the penitentiary operations at the dawn of the 20th century. Without questioning the management of prisoners, the state entered the farming business in hopes of reaping as much profit as the lessees had done before. With Emancipation came new attacks on Black freedom, one of the most striking being their criminalization and incarceration. The over-representation of African Americans in the Louisiana carceral system served only to justify the choice made by penitentiary authorities in their business endeavors. Black women, who, even as a small minority of the incarcerated, already constituted a critical segment of the coerced labor force, and who represented a troublesome presence to authorities, continued in the 20th century to occupy a specific place in Louisiana carceral system. This is what the next chapters propose to explore in detail.

PART II

SPATIAL EXPERIENCES

Space and mobility/immobility are at the heart of an incarcerated person's experiences. Indeed, from their inception, one of the objectives of prisons has been to keep persons deemed criminal far away from the rest of society. Prisoners are removed from society in what geographer Dominique Moran calls an "act of coerced mobility"⁴⁰⁵. One of the means to achieve this separation is through architecture. Most prisons present high walls marking the physical separation between the inside and the outside, between the unfree and the free worlds. Although Angola penitentiary might appear as an exception because there was no wall around its compound, and its location was remote, its geography acts as a boundary wall. Boundaries serve not so much to prevent outsiders from penetrating the prison perimeter, but to prevent the incarcerated from leaving the perimeter⁴⁰⁶. Escaping might have been every prisoner's dream since the inception of prisons, but spatial control over the incarcerated is not limited to stopping their illegal exit from the prison; within the perimeter of the prison, their mobility is also restrained.

As Michel Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish*, spatial configuration is one of the tools used by the State to enforce its power over incarcerated individuals. Foucault describes Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon as an architectural ideal, which would allow for constant surveillance - actual or perceived - in turn influencing prisoners' behaviors and transforming them into "docile

⁴⁰⁵ Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 71.

⁴⁰⁶ For instance Abdela demonstrated the porosity of the Parisian prison during Ancien Regime in: Abdela, *La prison à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: formes et réformes*.

bodies”. More recently, Teresa Dirsuweit argued that spatial organization informs not only surveillance but also the normative function of the prison, reshaping prisoners’ identities over time⁴⁰⁷. Here again, with no high walls and with prisoners’ camps separated from one another Angola, might appear as an exception, because its architecture had little in common with traditional penitentiaries. On the other, Angola penitentiary is affiliated with a different type of custodial spaces: the slave plantation.

During Jim Crow, Angola reproduced some of the mechanisms for spatial control used during slavery, such as armed guards placed in the fields. Like the plantation, control of movement within the carceral environment serves to demonstrate the power of the institution over individuals in its custody. Space is also a factor shaping prisoners’ social relations with each other and with other actors in the prison, since social relations are enacted physically in places. For instance, the lack of privacy and its corollary, the constant presence of others more often than not define places of incarceration. These are part of the “pains of imprisonment” described by Gresham M. Sykes in his now-classic *Society of Captives*⁴⁰⁸.

The two following chapters answer questions related to the spatial organization at Angola and how it shaped African American women’s experiences of incarceration. It reveals how much violence, both past and contemporary to the incarcerated, defined their experiences of space at Angola. It also highlights how their resistance to this violence characterized their sense of place, and how their strategies sometimes foiled the State’s efforts to dictate spatial boundaries. Finally, it distinguishes spatial experiences of incarceration at Angola from African American women’s spatial experiences outside the penitentiary during Jim Crow, where they confronted other “geographies of power” having to navigate on a daily basis “landscapes constructed according to segregationist or white supremacist conceptions of power”⁴⁰⁹.

⁴⁰⁷ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir : naissance de la prison*; Teresa Dirsuweit, “Carceral Spaces in South Africa”, 2019 quoted in Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 21.

⁴⁰⁸ Sykes, *The Society of Captives*, chap. 4.

⁴⁰⁹ Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948*, 5.

The main argument developed in chapter 4 is that Black women's lives in custody were shaped by legacies tied to the 'longue durée' history of Angola as a place, as well as its peculiar geography. Chapter 4 examines women's first moments in the custody of the state when they were transported and admitted to the penitentiary, in order to reveal what might have been their first impressions of the place they would spend the next months, years or decades.

As I will demonstrate in chapter 5, the women's lives were shaped by the fact that they were housed in a predominantly male custodial institution where they were always an afterthought. Their experiences were also shaped by the landscape and by the spatial organization of the racially segregated 'female camp' where they were housed. This camp replicated the separate and unequal circumstances of the outside world. The spatiality of the prison echoed the broader spatial politics of segregation, and women found ways to challenge this order.

CHAPTER 4

THE DISPLACED

“If the soil could speak, it would tell of the sweat and blood it has soaked up, of lives it has claimed, and of reform”⁴¹⁰. This is how Angola prisoner Lane Nelson spoke of the space he was confined to in 1999. A few years later, Scott Whiddon made numerous visits to the penitentiary for his ethnographic project and remarked: “The history of this place hangs still and constant, like the thick, stifling heat of a Louisiana summer”⁴¹¹. In the following section, I propose to explore the history of Angola as a space over a longer period (examining its occupation before colonization and onto the 19th century) in order to demonstrate continuities or resonances between periods before 1901 and what occurred in the penitentiary context in the first six decades of the 20th century. I answer in this section feminist geographer Doreen Massey’s call to a “radical writing of history” that would consider the “conjunction of many histories and many spaces” in the identification of a place. She states:

[..] what I want to consider here is the ways in which places also stretch through time. Places as depicted on maps are places caught in a moment; they are slices through time. Yet, not only does that particular articulation of social relations which we are at the moment naming as that place have a history (as we have seen, it is the product of the historical accumulation and combination of numerous layers of such articulations over time) but also any claim to establish the identity of that place depends upon presenting a particular reading of that history⁴¹².

⁴¹⁰ Lane Nelson, “Blood, sweat & reform”, *The Angolite*, 1999, 24(6): 32–43. Quoted in Kennedy, ““Today They Kill With the Chair Instead of the Tree’: Forgetting and Remembering Slavery at a Plantation Prison”, 138.

⁴¹¹ Whiddon, ““To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest””, 139.

⁴¹² Massey, “Places and Their Pasts”, 188, 191.

4.1 Historical background of the Angola site prior to 1901

The Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP) has been located at Angola since 1901, in the West Feliciana Parish at the border with the state of Mississippi, on a site with a long and resonating history. Indeed, as a former slave plantation, which was previously the site of Indigenous occupations, this site encapsulates the “modern network of racial slavery entangled and resting upon [...] settler society” forged by white Southerners over a few decades⁴¹³. In this section, I examine the layered history of Angola as a place, and recharacterize it by redrawing its connections to a more global history, to be able to catch a glimpse of a new narrative where Angola can be seen as emblematic of the country’s history, born through both the pains of Indigenous genocidal dispossession and displacement and of African slavery. I suggest that these “twinning legacies”, foundational to the U.S. territorial expansion, reverberated into Black women’s experiences at Angola during Jim Crow⁴¹⁴.

4.1.1 Indigenous Territory: “the black hills of good earth”

Angola is a site located within a vast area of fertile lands forming the Mississippi Valley. Major climate changes occurred between 950 and 1250 CE, with the climate shifting from warm and dry to warmer and wetter weather, leading Indigenous people in the Southwest and Southeast of North America to become “predominantly agrarian”, resulting in the prosperity of sedentary and mound-building societies in Louisiana and Mississippi⁴¹⁵. Before they formed “multiethnic

⁴¹³ Ayers, *Southern Journey: The Migrations of the American South, 1790-2020*, 39.

⁴¹⁴ Gilmore, “Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference”, 20.

⁴¹⁵ William C. Foster quoted in Smithers, *Native Southerners: Indigenous History from Origins to Removal*, 36–37.

polities” (mostly after contact with Europeans), “large and small chiefdom societies flourished [...] through the interior Southeast and Gulf region”⁴¹⁶. In approximately 700 AD, the Mississippian transformation occurred, when “native nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley began to become more fully integrated with the Aztec and Mayan cultural spheres” and adopted “communal ownership, hierarchical religious structures, centralized government, large towns, formalized class structures, mound building, and a corn-centered agricultural economy”⁴¹⁷.

The Spanish, members of the De Soto’s expedition (1539-1542), were the first Europeans to explore the portions of the Mississippi river around Angola. The chroniclers reported large communities and extensive fields of maize and other crops. The next major expedition was led by LaSalle, which departed from New France (present-day Quebec) in late December 1681 and descended the Mississippi River from present-day Chicago to the Gulf, and resulted in the claiming of the Mississippi Valley basin under the name Louisiana. René-Robert Cavelier sieur de LaSalle who conducted this expedition was French, and he claimed this territory for the kingdom of France erecting a cross on the banks of the Mississippi in April 1682⁴¹⁸. It was in 1699 that Pierre Le Moyne, sieur d’Iberville “rediscovered the mouth of the Mississippi river and ascended the river as far as the Houma Indian village near the mouth of the Red River” on what is now Angola penitentiary. Iberville’s great find was only a discovery to whites, since the Houma were well aware of its existence. Indeed, they “apparently controlled an area along the Mississippi from [present-day] West Feliciana Parish south to Orleans Parish. Their principal village stood on the east bank of the Mississippi”⁴¹⁹. They called this location the “black hills of good earth”⁴²⁰. According to Michael “T. Mayheart” Dardar Sr., an historian and a member of the United Houma Nation, who grew up part of the Houma tribal community in Venice (the “Southernmost Point in Eastern Louisiana”), “the Houma nation had established itself in a fertile area of rich floodplain and steep hills north of modern-day Baton Rouge before Iberville’s

⁴¹⁶ Smithers, *Native Southerners*, 44–45, 53.

⁴¹⁷ Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 41.

⁴¹⁸ Verdin, “Ebb and Flow: Southward into the Vanishing Lands”, 22.

⁴¹⁹ Greg Bowman and Janel Curry-Roper, *The Houma People of Louisiana: A Story of Indian Survival*, 1982, quoted in United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Mississippi River Cultural Resources Survey, A Comprehensive Study, Phase I, Component A: Thematic Historical Overview”, 55.

⁴²⁰ Verdin, “Ebb and Flow”, 22.

expedition. Tribal bands travelled among seasonal villages and enjoyed the strategic and agricultural advantages of their lands: ‘we had principal villages, hunting villages, we had fishing villages’⁴²¹.

Iberville made the following description of the Houma village he encountered during his expedition:

This village is located on a hill, on which there are 140 huts. There are possibly 350 men at most and many children. All the huts are on the slope of the hill, in two rows in certain places and in a circle. In the middle, there is a village square 200 yards wide kept in good order. The corn fields are in little valleys and on hills in the vicinity. This whole region is chiefly hills of fairly good black soil. There are no rocks whatsoever; I have not yet seen any at all since I left the sea. The village is 2 ½ leagues north of the river. The woods are hardwood trees, mixed with all sorts of oaks, and particularly a great many canes in the bottoms. I saw no fruit tree there. They gave me nuts of two kinds: one kind being hard nuts like the ones of Canada, the other kind small ones shaped like olives and no bigger. So far they have cultivated nothing except some melon, but have sowed tobacco⁴²².

This quote from Iberville attests that Indigenous people lived in communities with well-established social systems, as well as economic resources, despite the European belief “that Indigenous people could never have formed complex social and political structures worth [sic] of sovereignty”⁴²³. It also renders visible the Europeans’ interest in appropriating these resources, which they started doing when a vast portion of North America was claimed on behalf of the French Kingdom.

Soon, Indigenous people in the region would be involved, willingly or otherwise, in European imperial ambitions:

[..] over the first half of the 18th century, [...] the Houma and other Native American tribes across southeastern North America were drawn into France and England’s fight for dominance of the region. The Houma had established a strong alliance with the

⁴²¹ Cleaver, “Pushed to the coast by man, indigenous people in southeastern Louisiana feel nature's push back”, <https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/pushed-coast-man-indigenous-people-southeastern-louisiana-feel-natures-push> consulted October 15, 2021.

⁴²² Pierre LeMoyne Sieur d’Iberville, Iberville’s Gulf Journals. Edited and translated by Richebourg Gaillard, quoted in United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”, 31. I want to express my gratitude to Eric James Touns who brought this document to my knowledge.

⁴²³ Smithers, *Native Southerners*, 25.

French in 1699, with the arrival of Pierre Le Moyne, sieur d'Iberville, which made them targets of attacks by the English-allied Chickasaw⁴²⁴.

The Houma “left in 1706 as the result of a surprise attack upon them by the Tunicas [sic], whom they had earlier accepted as refugees from Alabama and Chickasaw disturbances farther north.” The Tunica, another smaller Indigenous nation (“petite nation” as the French colonists called them) “had moved into the region, initially living among the Houma, after being driven from their villages upstream by the Chickasaw”⁴²⁵. They later occupied the village, taking over the rich hunting territories. Decades of conflict between the colonial powers and their Native proxies, culminating in the French and Indian War (1754–1763), eventually pushed the Houma out of their traditional territories⁴²⁶. The Houma migrated and resettled closer to the Gulf (modern-day parishes of Terrebonne, Lafourche, and St. James), where they still struggle to maintain their communities today⁴²⁷. Their retreat deeper in the wetlands was possible thanks to Rosalie Courteau, a member of the Houma nation, who, before the Civil War, bought “a large tract of public swamplands to secure a land base for her people”. They had to abandon their reliance on agriculture for subsistence and adapt to a coastal way of life, which is currently threatened by the on-going destruction of the ecosystem accelerated by oil exploitation in the Gulf of Mexico⁴²⁸.

As for the Tunica, a Catholic mission, started in the surroundings of present-day Angola by Father Albert Davion in 1699, attempted for several years to “spread salvation” among them and other Indigenous groups in the region⁴²⁹. Contrary to their policy in New France at the same period, French enslavement of Indigenous people was not widespread in Louisiana (i.e. the

⁴²⁴ Cleaver, “Pushed to the coast by man, indigenous people in southeastern Louisiana feel nature's push back”, <https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/pushed-coast-man-indigenous-people-southeastern-louisiana-feel-natures-push> consulted October 15, 2021.

⁴²⁵ John R. Swanton, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States*, 1946, quoted in United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”, 32.

⁴²⁶ Smithers, *Native Southerners*, 86–87.

⁴²⁷ Cleaver, “Pushed to the coast by man, indigenous people in southeastern Louisiana feel nature's push back”, <https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/pushed-coast-man-indigenous-people-southeastern-louisiana-feel-natures-push> consulted October 15, 2021.

⁴²⁸ Verdin, “Ebb and Flow”, 23.

⁴²⁹ United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”, 33.

Mississippi Valley) although the French or their Indigenous allies generally carried off Indigenous people, the “Panis”, from Louisiana to Quebec for enslavement. Like in the Caribbean, the French were afraid of “combined African-Indian resistance” and preferred “to separate and antagonize Indians and Africans rather than place them on equal footing” by sanctioning the enslavement of Indigenous people where Africans or people of African descent were enslaved⁴³⁰. The Tunica traded with the French and were allies to the French in the war against the Natchez, at a period where French settlement increased, for instance in the Pointe-Coupée area, on the opposite shore of the Mississippi from Angola. The Tunica went farther south, to the area of present-day Trudeau, Louisiana. Their position became more tenuous with the cession of Louisiana to the Spanish in 1763 and they eventually migrated to Marksville, Louisiana, in the late 18th century⁴³¹. The Tunica were among “scores of Native Southerners [who] tried to both retain and rearticulate a sense of community and tradition in a world that grew increasingly hostile toward them”⁴³².

After 1763, the Lower Mississippi Valley saw aggressive immigration policies as well as the expansion of the plantation agriculture⁴³³. Pressure for Indigenous people’s removal grew as the expansion of the settler colonies expanded westward, and the 1820s and 1830s bore witness to the tragedies of forced diaspora (such as the Cherokee’s Trail of Tears) that displaced 70,000 to 100,000 individuals to reservations west of the Mississippi river⁴³⁴. In the latter half of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, the Tunica were also among the Indigenous peoples targeted by federal attempts at removal⁴³⁵.

Angola’s soil still holds some of this history underground. In 1936, the archaeologist James A. Ford from Louisiana State University (LSU) wrote a report on the Angola Farm site after he had

⁴³⁰ Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France*, 346.

⁴³¹ Fred B. Kniffen, Gregory F. Hiram and George A. Stokes, *The Historic Indian Tribes of Louisiana: From 1542 to the Present*, 1987 quoted in United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”, 34.

⁴³² Smithers, *Native Southerners*, 133.

⁴³³ Usner, *Indians, Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783*.

⁴³⁴ Smithers, *Native Southerners*, 13.

⁴³⁵ Smithers, *Native Southerners*, 161.

supervised a Works Projects Administration archaeological excavation; he worked on the Tunica Mounds that “were just outside the gates of the prison, but did not include any information from this site in his report”⁴³⁶. Fred B. Kniffen et al. also investigated the site and reported that there were many burials, some historic, and that there were also “74 ‘clay squeezes’ or Poverty Point objects.” Unfortunately, the mound was “completely levelled by the construction of the hospital at the Prison” in the 1930s (probably circa 1932)⁴³⁷. Mound building such as in Poverty Point⁴³⁸ and at Angola suggests “increased populations, social complexity beyond bands of hunters and gatherers, and the introductions of new technologies”⁴³⁹. Mounds were used mainly for ceremonial purposes and to bury the dead and their construction required scientific knowledge and engineering skills. They also embedded Tunica and other Indigenous peoples’ attachment to the place where they erect them and served as “visible assertions of political power and economic prosperity”⁴⁴⁰. Later “discoveries” occurred: the so-called “Tunica Treasure” composed of “thousands of European and aboriginal artefacts” was first excavated by Angola guard Leonard Charrier in the late 1960s. In 1976, Ross Maggio, then the Angola warden, reported the “Bloodhound Hill site”, which, located on the eastern portion of the Tunica Hills, “revealed seven burials [...] [containing] a large number and a wide variety of European trade goods reminiscent of the Tunica Treasure, as well as articles of aboriginal manufacture”. Some prisoners formed part of the crew who performed the survey of the site, along with staff from the Louisiana Division of Archaeology, the Peabody Museum at Harvard, and Louisiana State University⁴⁴¹.

⁴³⁶ United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”, 56.

⁴³⁷ Fred B. Kniffen, Gregory F. Hiram and George A. Stokes, *The Historic Indian Tribes of Louisiana: From 1542 to the Present*, 1987 quoted in United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”, 56.

⁴³⁸ Located in present-day West Carroll Parish, Poverty Point site is “unique for its large mounds, concentric patterned earthen ridges, huge amount of baked clay objects, and apparent extensive trade network”. It also refers to a period of prehistoric culture 1500 B.C. to 800 B.C. Source: United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”, 26.

⁴³⁹ United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”, 56.

⁴⁴⁰ Smithers, *Native Southerners*, 32, 49.

⁴⁴¹ United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Cultural Resources Survey of Fort Adams Reach Revetment, Mile 321.2 to 306.0-L, Mississippi River, Wilkinson County, Mississippi”, 57.

After the American Revolution and the Louisiana Purchase, white settlers controlled political institutions that ruled the (dis)possession of land, as well as banking and trade. The American South stood apart from other settler societies because it enjoyed “portable labor”. Enslaved workers were forcefully moved on to land Indigenous habitants had been forcefully removed from, allowing for planters to reconfigure nature at will and transform the land into intensive agricultural fields⁴⁴². The plantation, as Tiffany King argues, can be thought as “the result of settler colonial spatial patterns” that “obliterated” Indigenous presence and space⁴⁴³. This becomes more evident when considering that the settler and the “master” of the slave-plantation were indeed the same person, a perspective that is too often neglected⁴⁴⁴. Therefore, the plantation is created “as a key spatial unit of Black captivity and Native disappearance”⁴⁴⁵, or, as Katherine McKittrick argued, a site where “the lands of no one” were transformed into “the lands of someone” by means of Black forced labor⁴⁴⁶.

By the time of the Louisiana Purchase, small plantations were well established in the region of present-day Angola. At the turn of the 19th century, slavery spread rapidly in sediment-rich lands along the Mississippi River between Natchez and New Orleans with the introduction of cotton and sugar cane cultivation. During the 19th century, small plantations gave way to large slave plantations⁴⁴⁷. The slavery institution allowed for the creation of a “dominant landed class that routinely ripped itself up by the roots to create new plantations in its own vast and expanding territory”⁴⁴⁸.

⁴⁴² Beckert, “Cotton and the US South: A Short History”, 46.

⁴⁴³ King, “In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space and Settler Colonial Landscapes”, 32.

⁴⁴⁴ Frank Wilderson III quoted by King, “In the Clearing”, 33; Leroy, “Black History in Occupied Territory.”

⁴⁴⁵ Note 33 in King, “In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space and Settler Colonial Landscapes”, 23.

⁴⁴⁶ McKittrick uses “no one” to refer to the myth of European discovery of the Americas and the denial of Indigenous dispossession and genocide, therefore her conception of the plantation encompasses colonization. McKittrick, “Plantation Futures”, 8.

⁴⁴⁷ United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Archaeological Data Recovery at Angola Plantation, Sites 16WF121 and 16WF122 West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana”, 3.

⁴⁴⁸ Ayers, *Southern Journey*, 7.

Natchez, forty miles up the river from Angola, became an American plantation outpost and “a center for steamboat traffic, for westward-bound settlers, and for commerce related to the surrounding cotton and sugar plantations”⁴⁴⁹. Later, the slave port of New Orleans became an integral part of this global economy and “the main site of American cotton consolidation and shipping, handling the exchanges between planters along the Mississippi River and buyers in New York and Liverpool”. When Louisiana entered the Union in 1812, nearly half of its population was enslaved. Massive sugar plantations had also spread rapidly along the rivers of Louisiana⁴⁵⁰. The expansion of the settler colony in the South benefitted from cheap land. As a result, from 1800 to 1830, the enslaved population living in the South increased by forty percent⁴⁵¹. Enslaved men and women were brought to clear the land, reducing the forests to fields, and to plant the crops. In the meantime, the Indigenous population declined dramatically.

The domestic (interstate) slave trade almost doubled in the 1830s, fuelling the spatial expansion of the slave-society on Indigenous lands. As a result, millions of dollars circulated throughout the South⁴⁵². By 1850, two thirds of US cotton were produced on the territory resulting from the Louisiana Purchase⁴⁵³. By the 1850s, a quarter of the world’s sugar was produced by enslaved Black men and women working on Louisiana plantations⁴⁵⁴. Slavery boomed during the 1850s on both sides of the Mississippi River. Cotton and enslaved humans were sold at high prices during this period, which in turn made possible the investment required to clear land for American territorial expansion. The fast agricultural development of the region was fueled by the steamboat business, which was flourishing with the transportation of cotton to New Orleans and of human cargo to plantations, as well as by the nascent and quickly developing railroad infrastructure⁴⁵⁵. In 1859, sixty thousand slaves produced in the Mississippi Delta sixty-six million pounds of

⁴⁴⁹ Woods, *Development Arrested*, 43.

⁴⁵⁰ Ayers, *Southern Journey*, 8–9.

⁴⁵¹ Ayers, *Southern Journey*, 14.

⁴⁵² For more on this see: Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management*.

⁴⁵³ Beckert, “Cotton and the US South”, 49.

⁴⁵⁴ “Prime hands” were mostly young males between the age of thirteen and twenty, who died by the thousands of exhaustion and diseases such as malaria, a common occurrence in swamps. Young women were also sought for their reproductive capacity as well as their labor in the fields and in the planters’ households, although enslaved women’s poor nutrition and overwork resulted in a high mortality among infants. Woods, *Development Arrested*, 6.

⁴⁵⁵ Ayers, *Southern Journey*, 27–30.

cotton, “nearly ten times as much as was exported from Saint-Domingue to France during the height of its production in the early 1790s”⁴⁵⁶. By 1860, the three states of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana produced 5 million bales of cotton annually, compared to only 600,000 in 1820⁴⁵⁷. In 1860, 85 percent of Southern cotton was produced on plantations larger than one hundred acres whose owners also owned 91.2 percent of all slaves⁴⁵⁸. Only a quarter of Louisiana whites owned human property, but they were the ones dominating the economy and forming Louisiana’s political elites. Angola had then become a slave plantation, and belonged to a man who played a major role in the trafficking and exploitation of Black human beings.

4.1.2 Isaac Franklin’s slave plantation

Before the Civil War, the richest men held the best lands, filling up the fertile Mississippi valley from Memphis to Baton Rouge. One of these prominent kingpins was Tennessee-born Isaac Franklin, who co-founded Franklin & Armfield in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1828, one of America’s most prominent slave-trading firms of the antebellum era⁴⁵⁹. Twenty years before was adopted the “Act to prohibit the importation of Slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States”. That same year, Isaac Franklin, then aged nineteen, acted as witness on bills of sale for two enslaved people in Natchez, Mississippi⁴⁶⁰. In the following year, 1809, Isaac travelled to different states along with his older brothers, James and John, for the purpose of slave trading. Isaac Franklin and his partners John Armfield and Rice Ballard (who joined the two founders a few years later) were savvy and ambitious businessmen who contributed to and benefitted from the explosive growth of the domestic slave trade during the

⁴⁵⁶ Beckert, “Cotton and the US South”, 51.

⁴⁵⁷ Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*, quoted in: Manjapra, *Black Ghost of Empire: The Long Death of Slavery and the Failure of Emancipation*, 121.

⁴⁵⁸ Beckert, “Cotton and the US South”, 50.

⁴⁵⁹ For more on the internal slave trade, see *Purchased Lives*, an online exhibition of the Historic New Orleans Collection: <https://www.hnoc.org/virtual/purchased-lives> consulted January 7, 2022.

⁴⁶⁰ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain: How Domestic Slave Traders Shaped America*, 25.

1830s. They made millions of dollars trafficking thousands of enslaved Black men, women, and children from Alexandria, Virginia to the Lower Mississippi Valley⁴⁶¹. The geographic reach of their business rivalled any enterprise in the country, and New Orleans occupied a crucial place in their business since it was the location for most of their sales⁴⁶².

Franklin and Armfield's first human cargo was a group of 149 Black individuals, a quarter of them under the age of twelve, transported on a ship called the *United States*. Franklin proceeded himself to the sales in New Orleans. He sold slaves to locals as well as to buyers scattered across the neighboring sugar parishes⁴⁶³. Over a period of only eight years, the company forcibly transported between 8,000 and 12,000 slaves from the Upper South and sold them to Deep South planters and others. Its holdings encompassed private slave jails and other buildings in several states as well as several ships including the *Isaac Franklin*.

Already owning a cotton plantation in Sumner County, Tennessee, where he was the largest slaveholder in the state, Franklin invested some of his enormous profits in another piece of land in Louisiana. On May 27, 1835, he paid \$150,000 for a half interest in 7,767 acres of land and 205 enslaved people in West Feliciana Parish. He signed an agreement with the owner of the land, Francis Routh (brother of John Routh who would later be nicknamed the "Cotton King"). Routh had acquired more land than he could afford, was a bad manager and had debts, leading him to propose a partnership to Franklin, a long-time acquaintance⁴⁶⁴. In December 1837, Franklin bought it all since his partner could not assume his debts anymore⁴⁶⁵. He would eventually evict Routh and his family in the fall 1838⁴⁶⁶. The Panic of 1837 (brought by the decreasing price of cotton) made Franklin and his partners withdraw from active trading⁴⁶⁷.

⁴⁶¹ Gardullo, "Angola Prison", 23.

⁴⁶² Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 5, 117.

⁴⁶³ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 121–25.

⁴⁶⁴ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 244–45.

⁴⁶⁵ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 272.

⁴⁶⁶ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 304.

⁴⁶⁷ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 273.

Nevertheless, in 1840, Franklin was one of the largest slaveholders in West Feliciana Parish and his social prominence led to him being selected as a delegate to a state Democratic convention⁴⁶⁸.

Madison Henderson, a Black man who had been one of Franklin's enslaved servants, reported that Franklin considered it his prerogative to take sexual advantage of enslaved women "as much as I [he] pleased" and that he "cohabited every night with some one of them [enslaved women]"⁴⁶⁹. In his study of Franklin and Armfield, historian Joshua D. Rothman tells the story of Lucinda Jackson, an enslaved Black woman who was sold to Franklin for over five hundred dollars. Franklin raped her and had at least one child by her during the five years she was confined on his Tennessee plantation⁴⁷⁰. In 1839, Franklin married Adelia Hayes, a Tennessee young "belle", and daughter of a lawyer and slaveholder, who "possessed the training to manage a plantation household and command those enslaved in it, and [...] could handle the obligations of her class with ease"⁴⁷¹. He had arranged for Lucinda Jackson and her child to be taken away before he came back home with his wife, and they were sold as commodities before Adelia could even suspect their existence⁴⁷².

By the early 1840s, Franklin's property in West Feliciana Parish had grown to over eighty-three hundred acres. He bought hundreds of enslaved people, and put them to work on his land, which included thirty-three hundred acres of undeveloped land divided into three new plantations he called Panola (Choctaw for cotton), Loango, and Angola⁴⁷³. There seems to be no grounds to the common claim that the piece of land was named Angola after the region of origin of its first enslaved laborers. Indeed, the only documented sanctioned slave ship from the Kingdom of Kongo to Louisiana was *La Néréide*, which transported 294 enslaved persons from Cabinda [Angola] to the colony in 1721⁴⁷⁴. Rothman provides another explanation for this choice of names that seems more plausible and fitting with Franklin's crooked character:

⁴⁶⁸ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 277.

⁴⁶⁹ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 259, 279.

⁴⁷⁰ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 279.

⁴⁷¹ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 282–83.

⁴⁷² Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 284–85.

⁴⁷³ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 303.

⁴⁷⁴ White, *Voices of the Enslaved: Love, Labor, and Longing in French Louisiana*, 19.

None of the people Franklin enslaved had African names, and most were too young to have been born in Africa during the era of legal transatlantic traffic. The names Franklin gave his plantations were not gestures toward the people he enslaved there. They were ways of inserting himself into the global history of the industries that had made him his fortune. Franklin was gloating about the international trades in Black people and the most lucrative crop they produced, asserting a right to take the ancestral language and words of those whose land he held and whose bodies he exploited, and claim them as his own⁴⁷⁵.

On these new plantations, the enslaved laborers were put to work clearing the swampy cypress forest. Angola then began its operations as a sawmill and woodyard, and Franklin sold timber and lumber. The enslaved also put up miles of plank fencing that would mark the boundaries of their own mobility and of the cattle they raised.

In 1846, Isaac Franklin died, leaving to Adelia Franklin, his widow, a large estate that encompassed land and human property in several states, including the Angola plantation. His death made national news. His fortune amounted to nearly \$710,000 (the modern equivalent of \$435 million), almost half embodied in the 636 people he enslaved⁴⁷⁶. Adelia, then twenty-nine years old, became one of the richest women in the country. In 1849, Adelia remarried to Alabama-born Joseph Alexander Smith Acklen, a veteran from the Mexican War. The couple turned their properties into “the finest and best managed estate in the South”, equipped with a large personal dwelling built at Angola while disguising a slave labor camp in “neat frame houses”⁴⁷⁷. With their fortune, they also built the Belmont mansion in Nashville, which now sits in the middle of the campus of the Baptist Belmont University (see picture below)⁴⁷⁸. In 1860, the Acklen estate was among six in Louisiana with more than 500 enslaved individuals; the couple had 659 enslaved laborers on their six cotton plantations, all of them in the West Feliciana

⁴⁷⁵ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 303.

⁴⁷⁶ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 309–10.

⁴⁷⁷ *Southern Cultivator* quoted in Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 328.

⁴⁷⁸ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 359; Enslaved property was also largely used as a mortgage to secure loans. Bonnie Martin, “Slavery’s Invisible Engine: Mortgaging Human Property”, 2010 quoted by Beckert, “Cotton and the US South”, 53.

Parish⁴⁷⁹. In 1860, it was the largest estate in the West Feliciana Parish, producing 3,149 four-hundred-pound bales of ginned cotton⁴⁸⁰.

Figure 4.1: Belmont mansion, in Nashville, TN.



Photograph taken by the author, January 2020.

At the dawn of the Civil War, the population of the West Feliciana Parish was mostly composed of enslaved African Americans. In 1853, whites represented only 17.7 percent with 2,231 individuals. Free Blacks represented less than 1 percent with 70 individuals, and the enslaved population was 81.7 percent with 10,298 individuals⁴⁸¹. In the region, enslaved young

⁴⁷⁹ Menn, *The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana - 1860*, 99, 105.

⁴⁸⁰ Menn, *The Large Slaveholders of Louisiana - 1860*, 226–27; To offer a comparison, Stephen Duncan was the largest Delta planter in the late 1850s. He owned 1,036 slaves and the value of his property was estimated at \$1.3 million (the equivalent of \$36.5 million in 2014). Beckert, “Cotton and the US South”, 52.

⁴⁸¹ Quoted in United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Archaeological Data Recovery at Angola Plantation, Sites 16WF121 and 16WF122 West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana”, 39; For more information on free African Americans in the region in the antebellum period, see: Wilson, “Free People of Color in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana.”

men were over-represented due to the extreme physical demands of cotton and sugar cane production. Adelia was widowed for a second time when Joseph Acklen died in 1863 at Angola. Her fortune remained intact through the Civil War, almost certainly because of her powerful position⁴⁸². According to Rothman, Adelia:

got Confederate officials to exempt her from orders to burn all cotton lest it fall into enemy hands. She got Union officials to provide a gunboat escort and permissions to hire wagons. Then she shipped from New Orleans more than two thousand bales of stock-piled cotton and sold it in Liverpool for nearly \$1 million⁴⁸³.

Angola's enslaved population had produced their last crop, but it was certainly not the end of Black labor on this land. Not much is known about Angola before it changed hands again after Reconstruction. It then entered a phase that could be qualified as a 'bridge' between the slave plantation and the state penal farm it would become in 1901 when it hosted state prisoners leased for their labor to yet another powerful businessman.

4.1.3 Samuel James' Big House

In 1880, former Confederate Major Samuel L. James bought the Angola Plantation for \$100,000 from Adelia Cheatham (as Isaac Franklin's widow had become after a third marriage). At that point, he had already been "renting out" the state prisoners for over ten years (see chapter 3). James exploited female prisoners as personal servants and "field hands" on his plantation, while sending their male counterparts throughout the state of Louisiana to build levees and railroads or perform agricultural work on other plantations. Some prisoners along with several hundred Black sharecroppers produced cotton for James at Angola. At least on one occasion, James resorted to "importation" of North Carolina farm laborers: in December 1889, 193 of them were brought by

⁴⁸² Adelia Cheatham died in 1887 leaving an estate valued at \$300,000. Four of her children survived her, including Joseph Hayes Acklen who represented the St. Mary Parish in the House of Representatives. Sources: *The Times Picayune*, May 6, 1887; "Mrs. Chatham's Will", *The Daily American*, May 19, 1887.

⁴⁸³ Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 360.

train to Louisiana to work on Angola plantation⁴⁸⁴. According to a document examined by historian Anne M. Butler: “At the conclusion of a successful harvest, James sent female convicts into the camp areas as ‘rewards’ for male convicts and, thus, extracted both heavy agricultural labor and sexual service from women prisoners”⁴⁸⁵. Black women performed different kinds of labor during their captivity under James’ authority. In a 1887 correspondence to one of his sub-contractors, Alexander Blanche from Marydale Plantation, James mentioned two of the Black female prisoners: one was in the ‘Big House’ at Angola and the other was doing her sentence at Marydale. His description of the two women focuses on their skills and on the labor that he hoped both men could extract from them:

I have a woman here a new and excellent cook having a year to go. I wish to exchange for the long term woman you have – please send her down on the Leathers with one of the boys and he can take back this woman which I’m satisfied will serve you better for a house servant as she is used to that kind of work and no use in the field whereas the one you have is a good fieldhand⁴⁸⁶.

Not unlike Isaac Franklin before him, Samuel James enjoyed a good reputation as a successful businessman despite his trading in human lives. He had “a second home in New Orleans where he and his wife would receive the city’s elite. Their ‘very elegant toilets and cordial hospitality’ would be noted in the paper’s gossip columns”. Journalist Shane Bauer also noted that the family would travel between Angola and New Orleans on James’ steamboat “eating delicious meals and playing poker on deck, while transporting convicts in the cargo below”⁴⁸⁷.

Upon James’s death in 1894, his son Samuel Lawrence James Jr. took over the lease, and moved into the Angola Big House where Black women prisoners worked as his domestic servants. The “convict camp” consisted of a poorly-ventilated fifteen-by-twenty-foot shack located half a mile from the mansion where fifty people would often be crammed⁴⁸⁸. In contrast, the ‘Big House’:

⁴⁸⁴ “Personal and General Notes”, *The Daily Picayune*, December 26, 1889.

⁴⁸⁵ Roger S. Thomas, Assistant Warden, to Frank C. Blackburn, Warden, “History of Angola: Major Samuel Lawrence James”, 27 Dec. 1985, quoted in Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West*, 183.

⁴⁸⁶ Samuel L. James to Alexander Blanche, 16 April 1887, Mss. 3342, Range W:48, Box 1, Folders 1-7, Alexander Blanche Papers December 1851-September 1914, LLMVC.

⁴⁸⁷ Bauer, *American Prison*, 128.

⁴⁸⁸ Bauer, *American Prison*, 128.

built before the Civil War [...] was a large wooden house consisting of nine bedrooms, halls upstairs and downstairs, side galleries and back galleries.[...] In the yard also were two servant houses, chicken house and small stable at far end.[...] About half a mile from the house was the plantation store and office. Nearby was a convict camp where a few convict men and women were housed. These few worked on the plantation and also as servants in the ‘Big House’⁴⁸⁹.

Cecile James Shilstone, Major James’ granddaughter and Samuel Lawrence Jr.’s daughter, was raised at Angola during the convict leasing years. In her memoirs, she remembered fondly her childhood and explained that:

[...] the large house with the large family needed plenty of servants. Most of them were convicts. The nurse for my sister was a convict woman in for murder! Papa always chose the murderers in preference to thieves to act as servants. A thief is a sneak and not to be trusted in one’s house. Once a thief, he’s apt to steal again. Whereas, a murderer is hot-headed, commits a crime which he is usually sorry for later and will not do so again. Of course, these people were “trustees” [sic] and had to be handled with diplomacy. When a servant was not competent, she was not scolded – only another was sent from camp to fill her place next day⁴⁹⁰.

It might be surprising that, in his house and around his children, Lawrence James preferred seeing women convicted of violent crimes than women convicted of property offenses. However, decades later, LSP officials apparently shared his vision when they decided to assign Black women to be ‘house servants’ for penitentiary officials living at Angola or outside (see chapter 7). According to Cecile James Shilstone, “Papa rose by the plantation bell ringing at day-break. Coffee was brought to the bed by servants” and in the dining room, “Over the table was suspended our fan. [...] A little Negro boy would sit on the stairs leading from the hall upstairs and would pull a rope that controlled the fan”⁴⁹¹. The James family had access to convict labor as well as sharecroppers and their families’ labor; these “free” and coerced laborers not only produced agricultural crops generating wealth for the family, but also allowed them to have a lifestyle resembling the one of antebellum plantations. Shane Bauer points out that Shilstone’s recollection of her idyllic childhood at Angola “differed greatly from the few scant accounts reporters recorded from prisoners, which described a dawn-to-dusk work regimen, whippings,

⁴⁸⁹ James Shilstone, *My Plantation Days*, 5-6.

⁴⁹⁰ James Shilstone, *My Plantation Days*, 10.

⁴⁹¹ James Shilstone, *My Plantation Days*, 11.

and being forced to sleep in muddy clothing”⁴⁹². Oblivious to the violence inflicted daily on prisoners living only half a mile away, Shilstone also held back from her memoirs the accounts of the brutality inflicted by her grandfather and her father’s regime on prisoners, brutality which was publicly exposed afterwards. Indeed, the high death rate, especially in levee camps where Black men were sent by the lessees to build levees to protect the homes and plantations of other Louisianans, was the official reason invoked by the Louisiana legislature to withdraw the lease, and take over the full management of state prisoners (see chapter 3).

By what seems to be an odd set of circumstances, but was most probably the result of a cold calculation of the potential economic outcomes of such an enterprise, the state decided to buy the Angola plantation and to transform it into a penal farm in 1901, making it progressively over the next decades its state penitentiary headquarters⁴⁹³. However, when the state of Louisiana made the decision to acquire the Angola plantation, it chose not only to turn to agricultural production as a source of income for the state, but also to adopt a custodial strategy for its prisoners close to slavery. The plantation model embodies the “conjunction of territory and a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence”. Indeed, plantations were created as spaces “with issues of control in mind”. Designed by whites to control Blacks, the plantation constituted “a geography of

⁴⁹² Bauer, *American Prison*, 129.

⁴⁹³ To be more exact, the State of Louisiana bought Angola, Loango, Bellevue and Killarney plantations, which were all adjacent properties belonging to Samuel James Jr. and located in the West Feliciana Parish. They would eventually be combined to form the Angola penal farm. Other plantations adjacent to Angola were added until 1924 when the penitentiary site attained 18,000 acres, which it is still at present. Additional land was also acquired through the years in other localities (Hope Plantation on Bayou Teche, Oakley and Monticello Plantations in St.-Gabriel) to provide labor (and housing) for male prisoners. Eventually some of the latter were sold, one of the reasons being that a large number of men could be made available for road and highway construction. Source: Official Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the State of Louisiana at the Second Regular Session of the Third General Assembly Under the Adoption of the Constitution of 1898, Begun and Held in the City of Baton Rouge, May 9, 1910. By Authority. Baton Rouge, The New Advocate, Official Journal, 1910. Call number J87.L8 1910c, LLMVC. The Good Roads movement was in full force in Louisiana at the beginning of the 20th century and coerced labor was instrumental to the development of the road network. For instance, in 1908-1909, state prisoners were building roads in Rapides, De Soto, Ouachita and East Baton Rouge parishes. The *New Orleans Good Roads Association* provided the equipment for these road camps. Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1908-1909, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Road construction performed by male prisoners also brought a significant income to the state, who was charging parishes for their labor. For instance, for the fiscal year 1931-1932, four road camps located in the parishes of Washington, St. Helena, East Feliciana and West Feliciana produced \$243,927.24. Source: Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Report to His Excellency, The Honorable O.K. Allen Governor of Louisiana and to The Honorable Senators and Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana, May 1932, Call number 365.3 La, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Details on page 7.

discipline and confinement and for most slaves, extremely limited mobility”⁴⁹⁴. By purposefully converting the Angola plantation into a penitentiary, the state of Louisiana embraced “the normalizing mechanics of the plantation, wherein black subjugation and land exploitation go hand in hand”⁴⁹⁵.

As noted by Paul Gardullo, curator of the National Museum of African American History and Culture: “the structure of the plantation and its racial attitudes have shaped and continue to shape Angola, not just in its physical environment but in its relationships and culture”⁴⁹⁶. The presence of Angola penitentiary in today’s Louisiana landscape and the implications for Black Louisianans do not go unnoticed: “What is it about the social and ontological position of the black subject in the United States that makes his disappearance onto a modernized slave plantation both socially tolerable and experientially normal?” asked Dennis Childs in his thought-provoking book about African Americans’ re-enslavement after Emancipation through the penal system⁴⁹⁷. His interrogations echo in Clint Smith’s exploration of Angola as a site of memory of American slavery:

If in Germany today there were a prison built on top of a former concentration camp, and that prison disproportionately incarcerated Jewish people, it would rightly provoke outrage throughout the world. I imagine there would be international summits on closing such an egregious institution. And yet in the United States such collective outrage at this plantation-turned-prison is relatively muted⁴⁹⁸.

I choose to use the term penitentiary-plantation in this text to refer to Angola, reverberating New Orleans poet and activist Chuck Perkins’s chant: “the penitentiary is the plantation, and the plantation is the penitentiary”⁴⁹⁹. This allows for incorporation into my work of the argument of a “slave parentage of the American prison system”⁵⁰⁰. However, as the plantation model was also developed within the settler colonial state as a way to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land,

⁴⁹⁴ Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948*, 33, 35.

⁴⁹⁵ McKittrick, “Plantation Futures”, 11.

⁴⁹⁶ Gardullo, “Angola Prison”, 26.

⁴⁹⁷ Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 96.

⁴⁹⁸ Smith, *How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America*, 101.

⁴⁹⁹ Chuck Perkins, “Angola”, album *A Love Song for NOLA*, 2012, Trikont Records.

⁵⁰⁰ Mumia Abu Jamal about Angola, “Panthers Still Caged in Angola”, Free the Angola 3, www.prisonactivist.org/angola/support.shtml#mumia, quoted in Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 97.

the term is also used here to encapsulate the historical entanglements of settler colonialism and slavery⁵⁰¹.

I argue in this chapter that the penitentiary-plantation has been an inhospitable place for Black lives, and that this applied in gender specific ways to Black women's lives during Jim Crow. LSP policies and practices of racial and gendered domination and dehumanization can be read as "deliberate attempts to destroy a black sense of place"⁵⁰². Although these policies and practices greatly shaped Black women's experiences of space (and time), they could not fully define them. Indeed, their own resistance to the carceral institution also marked Black women's experiences of space and time because it disrupted spatial and time orders. As Saidiya Hartman argued in *Scenes of Subjection*, it was the "brutal exercise of power that gave form to resistance"⁵⁰³ and therefore, power and resistance are inextricably linked to each other.

In the following sections, I will show how Black women's acts of survival during their incarceration at Angola were spatialized and inscribed in the geography of the penitentiary-plantation, its landscapes and its different spaces. To be sure, white supremacy and resistance to it were not the only features of a "black sense of place" for these women prisoners⁵⁰⁴. There are other elements discussed below that could help us gain a better understanding of their spatial experiences as a whole. However, I believe that the examination of the 'longue durée' history of the space where Louisiana officials decided to install their new penal operations allows us to grasp the resonance of successive layers of violence that scarred its landscapes and haunted African American women's experiences during their incarceration.

⁵⁰¹ Leroy, "Black History in Occupied Territory."

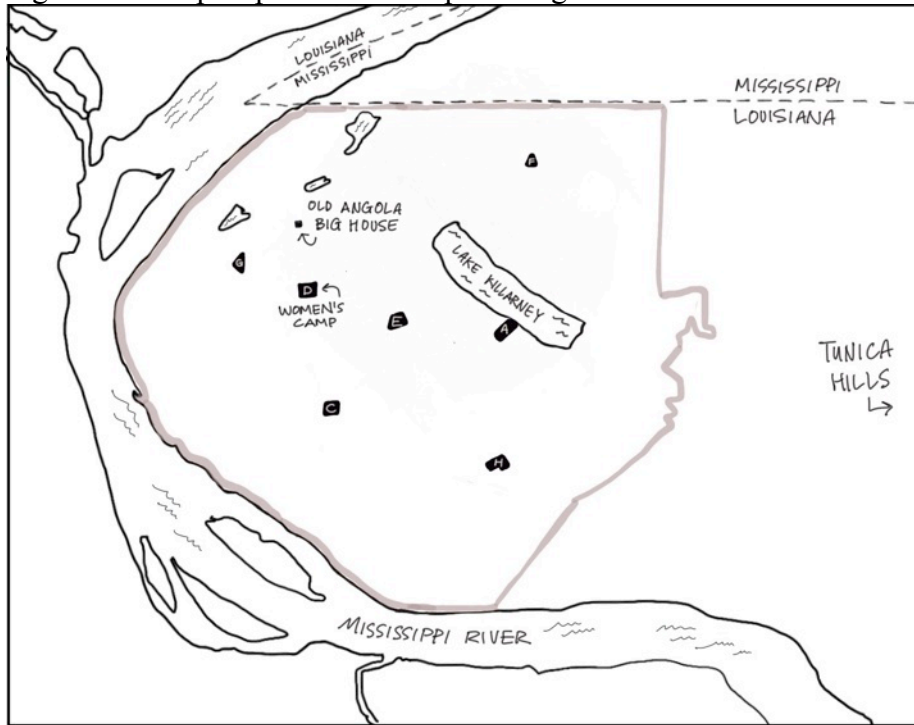
⁵⁰² McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place", 947.

⁵⁰³ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 62.

⁵⁰⁴ McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place", 949.

4.2 Geography of confinement

Figure 4.2: Map of prisoners' camps at Angola



Map by Stephanie Cox. Reproduced with the artist's permission.

As shown in the above map, the 18,000-acre plantation was (and still is) bounded by the Mississippi River on three sides and the Tunica Hills on the fourth, making it look like it is “shaped like an animal trap”⁵⁰⁵. One large meander of the river forms the western and southern limits of the site, while it delimits its northern extremity, also serving as a state boundary between Louisiana and Mississippi⁵⁰⁶. Flooding being a constant concern along the Mississippi, levees had to be erected to protect the crops. Therefore, many male prisoners, probably mostly Black men, worked almost constantly over the period to build or reinforce levees around the penitentiary-

⁵⁰⁵ “America’s Worst Prison”, *Collier’s Magazine*, November 22, 1952.

⁵⁰⁶ United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, “Archaeological Data Recovery at Angola Plantation, Sites 16WF121 and 16WF122 West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana”, 2.

plantation, contributing themselves unwillingly to the spatial configuration of their captivity⁵⁰⁷. To the east, the Tunica Hills enclosed the parts not surrounded by the river. The hills ranged from three to twenty-three miles in depth, and presented (at least until the 1950s) “a range of very rugged uninhabited series of hills and gulches”⁵⁰⁸. Animal life was abundant in the wooded parts of the Tunica hills, “ranging from wild turkey to deer to the Webster’s salamander and the Louisiana black bear”⁵⁰⁹, an abundance that pleased Chief security officer and deer hunter John C. Butler (also the women’s camp matron’s husband)⁵¹⁰.

Despite these natural barriers, constructions were added to reinforce the enclosing of the space. Louie A. Jones, warden from 1936 to 1940:

instituted a system of guard towers completely surrounding the penitentiary, and located at all strategic points, all connected by telephone with a central bureau. He appointed squads of \$2-a-month guards and hired a man, who had been discharged from the Army, to give the guards some semblance of military drill.

Jones also installed a troop of state policemen who “would patrol the penitentiary in state cars from dawn to dark” and intervened in the event of escape attempts⁵¹¹.

⁵⁰⁷ At several occasions, major floods caused disruption of the activities on Angola, and even evacuation of the prisoners. In 1903, the entire plantation of Angola was flooded. In 1912, the levees around Angola plantation broke and the entire place was inundated. Source: Addenda, Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. All crops were lost as a result. Two hundred other LSP prisoners, stationed at Oakley penal farm, were sent to Baton Rouge and put to work on the protection levee. Source: “Front Levee at Baton Rouge Expected to Break”, *The Town Talk*, May 3, 1912. The 1912 flood affected was one of the most devastating for the Atchafalaya Basin. All of Pointe Coupée parish was flooded. Railroads and highways in the region were closed for months. Source: Kemper, *Rebellious River*, quoted in Clark, *Remember My Sacrifice*, xxii, 8. In May 1922, all prisoners had to be evacuated. The 1922 flood displaced 70,000 people in Louisiana following breakages in the levees. Prisoners contributed to the efforts of protecting the levees. Source: Clark, *Remember My Sacrifice*, xxiv. In 1927, a flood “generally considered to be the greatest of all floods”, caused devastation in the Mississippi Valley requiring the intervention of the Red Cross that established 154 refugee camps where African Americans were often guarded at gunpoint by the National Guard, and deprived of food and relief by whites. Woods, *Development Arrested*, 118-119. It also caused the destruction of Angola’s blacksmith shop. Several hundreds of state prisoners were requisitioned to consolidate the levees between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Sources: “River Levees Saved”, *The Town Talk*, April 16, 1927; “Convicts Toil Heroically on River Levees”, *The Times*, May 15, 1927.

⁵⁰⁸ Reed Cozart Assistant Director Department of Institutions to Mrs. Blanc Cox Bruns, 25 September 1953, Manuscript collection Ms-236, Angola Penitentiary, Louisiana Division/City Archives and Special Collections, New Orleans Public Library.

⁵⁰⁹ “Grant to Preserve Part of Tunica Hills”, *The Times Picayune*, August 9, 1992.

⁵¹⁰ Board of Institutions, Subcommittee on Penal Institutions, Records & Transcription, 10 October 1960, folder 34, Collection P1981-497, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. Quote on page 105.

⁵¹¹ “Hell on Angola”, *The New Orleans Item*, July 10, 1943.

Within the perimeter of the penitentiary, there are two lakes, Lake Killarney and Sugar Lake. One of them was lauded by LSP superintendent and occasional visitor to Angola William T. Mitchiner as “a 750-acre lake alive with fish and having a surface population of ducks, which, in their gorgeous plumage, compete with the myriad colors of the lake in the sun’s early light”⁵¹². At some point, some prisoners had access to Sugar Lake, which offered fish to trusty guards allowed to fish from a boat⁵¹³. Lake Killarney was open for outsiders: locals from the surrounding community who requested the authorization to come and fish. Employees and their families would enjoy the lakes. Only exceptionally, they could become a site of pleasure for prisoners but were probably out of reach for most of them for most of their time on the penitentiary-plantation.

In January 1955, a few “free people” organized an outing at the lake with “fifty-one Jills and Judys”, a portion of the women from Camp D, where they went fishing, and had a picnic on the beach. The philanthropist Mrs. Mattie Waters of Raleigh, N.C. had sent food for the event. The picnic was made up of tuna sandwiches and layer cakes prepared by the Camp D’s Black cooks. All the illustrations by John Maxwell in *The Angolite* show white women in seductive poses enjoying their day, although at least one Black woman was in attendance⁵¹⁴. The exceptional nature of this getaway can be perceived in the length of *The Angolite* article and the careful reporting of anecdotes that had occurred over the course of the few hours spent at the lake. The omission of the racial mixing of the event in its visual presentation could seem trivial. However, the fact that Maxwell choose to recast the beach experience as all-white followed the same logic of spatial segregation that characterized other spaces in the penitentiary-plantation as much as outside of it. This racialized spatial division was considered to be as natural as the for-whites-only beaches on Lake Pontchartrain where New Orleans whites designated swimming spots for their own use, relegating African Americans to less desirable portions of sand, if any. Only Black

⁵¹² W.T. Mitchiner, “Angola - Louisiana Penal Farm”, *Louisiana Municipal Review*, VI (1943), p. 1. Quoted in Mouldous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System”, 80.

⁵¹³ “2 Negro Trustees Lose Their Lives In Recent Days”, *The Morning Advocate*, September 24, 1940.

⁵¹⁴ *The Angolite*, June 11, 1955.

New Orleanians' several-year battle for the development of West End finally gave them access to the pleasure of swimming in the lake in safe conditions⁵¹⁵.

Mobility within the penitentiary-plantation was an ongoing issue, for both prisoners and others. At the beginning of the 20th century, the circulation both within the site and between the site and the outside world was limited. By 1905, the prison had 3.5 miles of railroad, serving the penitentiary sawmill (crucial for the construction operations) and by 1923, it had 14 miles of tracks, some of them remaining in place until the 1940s⁵¹⁶. An additional ten miles of roads were built in the early 1930s to and from the general hospital and receiving station, when they were moved from Baton Rouge to Angola's Camp E⁵¹⁷. Dirt roads would cut across the land to connect the different camps to fields and to main buildings, and mule carriages were in use for years after the beginning of the penitentiary operations. Until a secondary state highway road (U.S. Highway 61) was built during Governor Huey P. Long's term, the Mississippi was the best way to access the penitentiary-plantation. The Carter Packet Company's steamer *Belle of the Bends* operated by Captain E.G. Carter travelled regularly from New Orleans to Angola⁵¹⁸. Later, a ferry was maintained and operated by the prison allowing for the crossing of the river to the Pointe Coupée Parish. This situation of course had a tremendous impact on access to the prison. In 1953, there were still "no rail nor bus connections [...] for the convenience of employees, visitors and of the discharging of prisoners"⁵¹⁹. Within the penitentiary-plantation, comings and goings were of course restricted, although, there was more than one pattern of movement performed by Black women at Angola on a regular basis (see chapter 7 in particular).

⁵¹⁵ For instance, see: "A Beach for Negroes", *The Times-Picayune*, April 24, 1930.

⁵¹⁶ United States Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District, "Archaeological Data Recovery at Angola Plantation, Sites 16WF121 and 16WF122 West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana", 114.

⁵¹⁷ One went from the Tunica gate to Camp E, another one from Angola railway station to Camp E, and a last one from the ferry at Camp G to Camp E. Source: Louisiana State penitentiary, Baton Rouge, La., Report to His Excellency, The Honorable O.K. Allen, Governor of Louisiana and to the Honorable Senators and Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana, May, 1932, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC.

⁵¹⁸ "Mississippi River to Angola" (advertisement), *The Times-Democrat*, September 1, 1910.

⁵¹⁹ Reed Cozart Assistant Director Department of Institutions to Mrs. Blanc Cox Bruns, 25 September 1953, Manuscript collection Ms-236, Angola Penitentiary, Louisiana Division/City Archives and Special Collections, New Orleans Public Library.

For Black women incarcerated at Angola, and for most of the other prisoners, Black or white, male or female, the landscape around their camp was probably the only landscape they saw every day: endless dirt roads that melted into the fields. In short, it was “disappointingly unattractive”, remarked an observer, “notwithstanding its picturesque location in the rolling hill country of West Feliciana Parish and of the bluffs of the Mississippi River”⁵²⁰. Even before they reached the women’s camp, new female prisoners had to undergo admission procedures at the penitentiary receiving station.

Most often, they had spent some time in a parish prison before being transferred to the penitentiary by authorities. An examination of court records reveals that the length of judicial processing varied a lot for African American women. Unfortunately, the data available does not allow for a clear picture of what happened to these women between their arrest and conviction. In some cases, they were released on bail. In other cases, it is evident that the women were confined in the parish prison while awaiting trial and conviction. After conviction, detention in the parish prison was followed by sentencing (sometimes with a few weeks delay) and finally by transportation by the parish law enforcement authorities (often by the sheriff himself) to the penitentiary receiving station. Any individual who had appealed the parish court judgement would be required to wait in the parish prison for the Louisiana Supreme Court decision, which in a few cases took over six months. Over the period 1901-1935, with the Supreme Court cases excluded, all Black female prisoners were ‘delivered’ to the penitentiary authorities, on average, eight days after their conviction. More precisely, over a quarter of the Black women were brought to the penitentiary the same day they were convicted (26.4 percent), almost half of them were brought the day after or within the week following their conviction (44.8 percent) and another quarter within the month following their conviction (22.8 percent)⁵²¹.

Based on court and penitentiary records, it appears that some judges imposed a fine or the equivalent in incarceration time in the parish prison to cover judicial fees, which might explain such delays. For instance, Alma D. was sentenced in Orleans parish in 1930 to a sentence of three

⁵²⁰ Report of the Advisory Committee to the Department of Institutions, 27 April 1944, Call number HV98.L8 L68, LLMVC. Quotes on pages 15-16.

⁵²¹ Source: Angola Women’s Database.

years and six months, and “to pay a fine of \$100.00 and in default of same to serve thirty days additional in the Parish Prison of the city of New Orleans”⁵²². The following table shows delays between conviction by the lower court and admission to the penitentiary for the five main parishes where Black women were convicted. State prisoners from East Baton Rouge parish were transported the quickest, which is logical considering the short distance from the parish prison to the receiving station (at least until February 1932 when the Baton Rouge receiving station was closed down) while state prisoners from Orleans parish were transported to the penitentiary after longer delays. The Orleans Sheriff penitentiary receipt book - listing all state prisoners delivered by the Sheriff to the penitentiary receiving station - shows that at the beginning of the period, the Sheriff would only go several times a year to the penitentiary to bring all the prisoners who were convicted in the past month or so together, which explains the delay⁵²³. The number of his trips would increase over time, up to several times a month, with most trips concerning over ten individuals, which is evidence for the increasing number of penitentiary sentences delivered by the Orleans parish over the period.

Table 4.1: Average delay and median delay between conviction date and admission date for Black women admitted to LSP 1901-1935 by parish in number of days (excludes women who appealed to the Supreme Court) (n=338)

Parish	Number of Black women	Average delay (in days)	Median delay (in days)
Caddo	67	7.6	5.0
E. Baton Rouge	55	1.2	0.0
Madison	30	3.8	3.0
Orleans	151	20.6	12.0
Ouachita	35	6.9	4.0
Total	338	12.0	5.0

Source: Angola Women’s Database

⁵²² Entry 19858, Volume 32, no. 19451-20100, 1930, LSP Collection.

⁵²³ Orleans Parish (La.) Criminal Sheriff, Penitentiary record book, 1896-1935, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.

4.2.1 Transport to the penitentiary receiving station

Until February 1932, when a receiving station was opened at Angola, this unit was located in Baton Rouge. First, it was located at the ‘Walls’, the dilapidated penitentiary in Baton Rouge, which was considered “a monument to the darkness of the past” and “an eye-sore” to Baton Rouge’s people⁵²⁴. In 1916, the city of Baton Rouge, wanting to remove the prison from its city limits, offered to buy it, dismantle the building and turn the land into a park⁵²⁵. The state of Louisiana agreed to the sale in January 1917⁵²⁶, and bought land two miles east of Baton Rouge to erect the new receiving station⁵²⁷. Therefore, until 1932, Parish sheriffs “delivered” the prisoners to Baton Rouge, easier to access, and from there, LSP authorities would transport the prisoners to Angola via the river (or to other “convict camps”).

Conditions of transport to the receiving station varied according to the “party” with whom an individual was transported. On March 20, 1929, Mabel D. was transported by “a large squad of deputies” from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. This “special treatment” was not due to her attempt “to make a break for freedom [on her way to the courtroom back to the Orleans Parish Prison] by striking at Deputy Sheriff Joseph Wicks, who was holding her. The blow landed on the sheriff’s eye, but he managed to subdue her and lead her back to the dock”. At 15 years old, even with a murder conviction, she was not considered a threat. Her reaction was certainly attributed to the life sentence she had received. The “large squad of deputies” she arrived at LSP with had

⁵²⁴ “A Necessary Change”, *The Shreveport Journal*, November 23, 1916.

⁵²⁵ “Prison Plans Almost Ready”, *The Times*, July 2, 1916.

⁵²⁶ “Baton Rouge Buys State Prison Sites”, *The Town Talk*, January 6, 1917.

⁵²⁷ “Property Bought for a Receiving Station”, *The Shreveport Journal*, January 26, 1917; Report made by Hy. L. Fuqua, General Manager of the State Penitentiary to the Governor and General Assembly of Louisiana for the Regular Session of 1918 Covering the Biennial Period of 1916 and 1917, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC.

probably more to do with her “travel companions”: seven white men “who have figured in the most sensational crimes of the past few months”⁵²⁸.

Typically, the parish sheriff was alone with the prisoners he would accompany to the state penitentiary. This was the case for 21-year-old Mosella D. who, in 1913, was brought by train from Colfax along with two Black men⁵²⁹. Deputies took public trains and, therefore, prisoners were mixed with other travellers and forced to travel in shackles, which caused them both physical pain and public humiliation. Incidentally, this dehumanizing treatment is still used for Louisiana defendants and prisoners today. The transport from the parish might have been an occasion for women to experience the violence that they might be confronted with during their incarceration in a male penitentiary, assuming that they did not already have a taste of it in the parish jail. Were they chained to male prisoners? Were they treated differently than their male counterparts⁵³⁰?

In February 1932, a receiving station was installed at Angola’s Camp E (otherwise a white men’s camp) where the person in command, Captain John Singleton and later Captain W. H. Pittman, would take charge of the newcomers transported by parish sheriffs to the penitentiary-plantation.

4.2.2 Admission procedures

Until the 1950s, the admission process was “brutal and direct: a shaven head, identifying ‘big stripe’ clothing, and immediate assignment, generally within a week of his arrival, to the farm-line”. It is not clear if that description made by sociology student and former classification

⁵²⁸ Entry 18671, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929, LSP Collection; “Negro Girl Draws Prison for Life in Lover’s Death”, *The Times-Picayune*, November 8, 1928; “Twelve Criminals Will Leave Today for State Prison”, *The Times-Picayune*, March 20, 1929.

⁵²⁹ Entry 7683, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916, LSP Collection; *The Colfax Chronicle*, May 3, 1913.

⁵³⁰ Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West*, 133.

employee Joseph Mouledous also applied to women⁵³¹. They did receive “big stripes” uniforms as well, in the form of dresses or skirts, not pants, at least when “stripes” were in use. This “soul depressing stigma of the penitentiary” was suppressed in 1915 and replaced by khakis in a gradual change: the “most exemplary” prisoners received their new uniforms first, while “the stripes will be left as a legacy to the undeserving”. Presented as an “incentive [for prisoners] to raise themselves”, this gradual implementation was also motivated by the fact that several thousand dollars worth of striped cloth was stored at the ‘Walls’⁵³². In 1918, only ten percent of prisoners were still wearing stripes and it was “only a question of a short while before all will have gone into the scrap heap”⁵³³. However, Governor Huey Long and Warden J.E. McClanahan revived stripes in 1929, including for trusties, “to aid reducing escapes”⁵³⁴. In 1935, stripes were suppressed again⁵³⁵, and “broad stripes were replaced by white uniforms”⁵³⁶. The despised stripes must have come back another time, before black and white “big stripes” were replaced by blue denim clothing in the early 1950s, and later by pin stripes probably perceived as less “degrading” than the former version⁵³⁷. Then, “big stripes” were only available for Mardi Gras revelers at the Maison Blanche, the famous Canal Street store in New Orleans, and were designed for people who appreciated puns such as “you’ll have the time of your life” and sick jokes such as “round up your chaingang ... put’em in these fun-loving pajamas that turn realistic black and white prison stripes into a romantic pair by adding a big heart pocket”⁵³⁸.

⁵³¹ One of LSP official documents contradicts Mouledous’ account: “The hair clipping [...] has fallen into disuse at L.S.P. Without any formal consideration or debate, but more or less unconsciously, the conclusion seems to have been reached here in the penitentiary that hair has nothing to do with criminality”. Source: Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 7.

⁵³² “Stripes Must Go, Recommendation of Prison Board”, *The Times-Picayune*, April 4, 1915.

⁵³³ Report made by Hy. L. Fuqua, General Manager of the State Penitentiary to the Governor and General Assembly of Louisiana for the Regular Session of 1918 Covering the Biennial Period of 1916 and 1917, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 25.

⁵³⁴ “To Use Striped Uniforms Again at State Prison”, *Clarion-News*, June 6, 1929.

⁵³⁵ *The Abbeville Meridional*, February 16, 1935.

⁵³⁶ Source: Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 16.

⁵³⁷ Louisiana Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1955, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC. See page 27.

⁵³⁸ Advertisement for Maison Blanche, *The Times-Picayune*, February 13, 1958.

Figure 4.3: “Carnival pajamas”

lay 10 11 5.40

(so our employees can see the Momus parade)

you'll have the time of
your life on Mardi Gras in

**CARNIVAL
MATES
Pajamas**

4.00

Round up your chaingang . . . put 'em in these fun-
loving pajamas that turn realistic black and white
prison stripes into a romantic pair by adding a big
heart pocket . . . in bright red, too! . . . they'll cre-
ate attention wherever you go—and when you see
these you'll feel like the King of Mardi Gras be-
cause they're comfortable and tailored from excel-
lent quality broadcloth . . . after the Carnival is
just a happy memory, you'll enjoy them for sleep-
ing and lounging for a long, long time. A, B, C, D.

Source: Advertisement for Maison Blanche, *The Times-Picayune*, February 13, 1958.

In the fall of 1958, when Charlotte Mae Richardson met Black and white women at Angola for her sociological survey, they were wearing gray pin-striped skirts. However, Richardson also mentioned that some women were wearing blue jeans, suggesting a somehow looser dress code⁵³⁹. She also noted that some women dressed “neatly and stylishly insofar as the situation allows”⁵⁴⁰. One white woman declared that her “group of friends [in prison] fixed me up with clothes”, another one that “she can let [her friend] wear her clothes” suggesting the importance of the clothing and that solidarity between women could play a role in allowing a new comer to adjust to prison life in a very concrete and material way⁵⁴¹. Civilian clothes were preferred by prisoners, who typically resented stripes as material evidence of their inferior condition and of

⁵³⁹ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 111, 77.

⁵⁴⁰ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 74.

⁵⁴¹ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 94, 137.

their powerlessness within the institution. Female prisoners were known to particularly resent the imposition of ugly and unconformable clothes in carceral institutions that would defeminize them⁵⁴². In 1912, halfway through her one-year sentence, one of the female Black prisoners, 20-year-old Mamie J., tore up her clothing, an infraction she paid with seven lashes. In May 1911, another Black woman, Alice S., was whipped for “cutting up shoes” on the very day of her discharge. With this action, the 18-year-old farm laborer made it clear that she did not want to go back to civilian life with her prisoner’s apparel and “brogan shoes”. In return, Captain Harvey made it clear that, until she was free and out of the penitentiary limits, the woman was still under his power⁵⁴³.

Another question arises about admission procedures: were women’s heads shaven on their arrival at LSP? It had been the case for women in some western penitentiaries⁵⁴⁴. It might have been the case at LSP in the early 20th century but the historical record contains no evidence of this practice. However, women were subjected to other forms of humiliation during the admission procedures. The admission records provide hints of what the women’s experiences could have been. During the intake process, height and weight were measured, and facial features, hair and complexion examined. African American women’s complexions were described by a variety of skin colors, as the following table attests, suggesting the multiplicity of racialized identities that were placed upon Black individuals in Jim Crow Louisiana, the legacy of a complex colonial history⁵⁴⁵. Over the period, changes, possibly also attributable to a change in admission clerks, are noticed. For instance, the term ‘griff’ that had been used frequently in Louisiana during the 19th century to describe either “the offspring of a Negro and a mulatto or of a Negro and a Native-American” or “to refer to a darker-skinned mulatto,” disappeared from penitentiary

⁵⁴² Dobash, Dobash, and Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women*, chap. 4.

⁵⁴³ Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection, pages 668, 788; Entry 6079, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911; Entry 7208, LSP Collection; “Highwaylady in St. Tammany”, *The Daily Signal*, September 9, 1910.

⁵⁴⁴ Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West*.

⁵⁴⁵ A growing literature exists on the subject. See for instance: Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World*; Rankin, “The Forgotten People”; McPherson, “There Was a Tradition among the Women”; Roach, “Slave Spectacles and Tragic Octoroons: A Cultural Genealogy of Antebellum Performance”; Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black”; Lachance, “The Formation of a Three-Caste Society: Evidence from Wills in Antebellum New Orleans”; Gould, “In Defense of Their Creole Culture: The Free Creoles of Color of New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola”; Everett, “Free Persons of Color in Colonial Louisiana”; Aslakson, “The ‘Quadroon-Placage’ Myth of Antebellum New Orleans.”

records in the 1920s⁵⁴⁶. “Yellow” or “yellowish” were also frequently used to describe light-skinned Black women, another derogatory terminology African Americans despised. When admitted to LSP in November 1915, Bertha W.M., who claimed Choctaw and Creek heritage, was described as “copper griff”. Before her incarceration, she denied that she was Black, and on New Orleans street cars, she insisted to occupy a seat “in the part of the car reserved for white persons”. Her appearance was considered ambiguous by witnesses or by the press that reported on her “high cheek bones and pointed nose of an Indian”, and thick lips, as well as her straight hair. Despite this ambiguity and her own claims, the police declared she was Black, and therefore, the penitentiary probably adopted the same position⁵⁴⁷.

⁵⁴⁶ Long, *The Great Southern Babylon : Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920*, 236.

⁵⁴⁷ Entry 9738, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916, LSP Collection; “Martinez Child Found by Police; Kidnaper Caught”, *The Times-Picayune*, April 22, 1915. By counting her as African American in the Angola Women’s Database because I assumed she was placed in the Black section of the women’s camp, I also reproduced the same “identity theft”.

Table 4.2: Number of Black women described by complexion type (1901-1935)

Complexion type	Number of Black women
black	200
brown	152
dark griff	119
griff	111
light griff	76
dark brown	73
yellow	62
light brown	55
medium brown	44
mulatto / mulatta	40
light tan	4
yellowish	4
dark mulatto	3
tan	3
dark	2
light mulatto	2
light yellow	2
bright yellow	1
copper griff	1
dark tan	1
fair	1
medium dark brown	1
octoroon	1
quadroon	1
very dark brown	1
very dark griff	1
Not available	2
Total	963

Source: Angola Women's Database

In addition to these physical descriptions, several Black women's entries contain animal analogies and other derogatory representations of Black womanhood such as: "short pug nose", "flat stumpy nose", "small mongolian shaped eyes"⁵⁴⁸. Other descriptions make it clear that women were stripped naked in front of whoever was in charge of completing the admission records: a clerk on staff or possibly a male prisoner assigned to the task, or even several clerks, and maybe even the other prisoners admitted the same day. Some women's descriptions mention:

⁵⁴⁸ Entries 8359 & 8935, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916; Entry 16492, Volume 27, no. 16151-16824, 1925-1926, LSP Collection.

“large birthmark left side of stomach”, “cut scar center of breast”, “scar above right nipple”, “scar top right breast” “two scars middle breast” “large birthmark over right breast”, “fleshmole near left nipple”. Some features might have been a special subject of comments or mockery: “S tattooed right breast”, another with a male name “and scroll tattooed across breast”, and one with a “bite scar under left breast”. The clerk obviously exercised meticulous voyeurism when he measured on a newcomer an “inch scar below right nipple”. He was asked after all to provide records detailed enough to identify an individual who might try to escape in the future⁵⁴⁹⁵⁵⁰. However, all women were probably subjected to similar intrusive examinations, and some white women’s descriptions also contain details such as “large brown mole right breast”, “flesh mole left breast”, or “very hairy nipples, scar left nipple”⁵⁵¹.

In 1944, admission procedures are described as such: The “newcomer is taken in hand by the inmate clerk and taken to a photograph room where he [or she] is fingerprinted and his [or her] picture taken”⁵⁵². The procedures seemed to have evolved little until the introduction of a classification process and the hiring of classification officers in the early 1950s that accompanied the modernization of the penitentiary. When Mouledous described the intake procedures in 1961, he observed that “two inmate clerks made an initial interview of each new inmate, these two inmate clerks performed their duties without immediate supervision and were actually in charge of the interview offices”⁵⁵³. After this initial interview, the new prisoner would meet staff members for different steps. With this professionalization, came innovations, such as an IQ test

⁵⁴⁹ Entries 368, 509, 1910, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entries 5529 & 6115, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911; Entries 6864 & 9828, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916; Entry 13369, Volume 19, no. 12856-15643, 1921-1925; Entry 24620, Volume 39, no. 24001-24650, 1933-1934, LSP Collection.

⁵⁵⁰ In the late 1940s, the dental department proceeded to a complete examination of each new prisoner and filled an Examination Card that served “as a valuable source of identification information in the event of death or escape of the inmate”. Source: Louisiana Department of Institutions, Biennial Report July 1, 1948- June 30, 1950, Call number HV8338 A2, LLMVC.

⁵⁵¹ Entries 38, 39, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entry 24850, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935, LSP Collection.

⁵⁵² Proposal for a survey at Angola, undated (ca.1944?), Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.1, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

⁵⁵³ Mouledous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System”, 179.

administered to every new prisoner⁵⁵⁴. Also, a quarantine period of two to four weeks was established in the early 1950s to prevent diseases from being spread, as well as to assess where the person would be assigned to according to their physical condition, race, whether they were first offenders, among other criteria⁵⁵⁵. Individual records on every newcomer would be compiled by the prison and the State Institutional Coordinating Bureau, providing information concerning the alleged crime, date of commitment, length of the sentence, as well as the “age at commitment, year of birth, place of residence, size of community, race, marital status, educational grade obtained, number of previous commitments, type of admission, juvenile commitments, and religion”. In 1958, Richardson observed that every newcomer would have an interview with the prison classification board who collected this information, which was then transferred onto IBM cards⁵⁵⁶⁵⁵⁷. A medical examination was also given, which included a chest x-ray, and a blood test⁵⁵⁸. Systematic gynaecological examination might not have been performed on admission, as it was the case in some female-only institutions such as Alderson Reformatory⁵⁵⁹. In total, this new admission procedure would have taken four weeks between the testing, interviewing and orientation⁵⁶⁰, whereas before, prisoners were sent to their respective camp the same day they were received at Angola⁵⁶¹. It is unclear from the historical record if women were kept that long

⁵⁵⁴ “The Otis Test of Intelligence was used. [...] The majority of inmates scored lower on IQ tests than the general population. However, this may or may not be the cause for the commission of a crime. It has never been established that intelligence is a factor in crime causation. It must be remembered that the average educational attainment of inmates is low, a fact which tends to penalize the entire group as to IQ, no matter how hard the test constructor may try to minimize the effects of education. Second, the prison environment isn’t the best for motivating test-takers to do their best. It is suspected that the anxiety of the situation may affect test scores unduly. Third, the majority of our admissions are Negroes, from rural backgrounds, who are penalized by intelligence tests generally standardized on northern, urban, and white population. In summary, even though most of our inmates scored below 100 in IQ, they, as a group, may not differ from other non-institutionalized citizens in Louisiana’s general population with similar educations, occupations and environmental backgrounds”. Source: Louisiana Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1955-56, Call number 976.3 (360.61) L888s, LARC.

⁵⁵⁵ Source: Louisiana Department of Institutions, Biennial Report July 1, 1948- June 30, 1950, Call number HV8338 A2, LLMVC.

⁵⁵⁶ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 29.

⁵⁵⁷ According to an official document: “A fast method of mass collection and analysis of data was developed early in 1955 by the Research Division of the Department of Institutions. This method utilizes an automatic punched card procedure known as IBM ‘Mark-Sense’”. Source: Louisiana Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1955-56, Call number 976.3 (360.61) L888s, LARC.

⁵⁵⁸ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 63.

⁵⁵⁹ Bryan, *Inside*.

⁵⁶⁰ Mouldous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System”, 158.

⁵⁶¹ Receiving Station Register Quarters F, Volume 12, 1934-1941, LSP Collection.

(and with men) in the receiving station, since there was only one female camp to assign them to. Although, it seems that the procedures of interview and medical examination also applied to them.

Historical records do not provide a clear picture of women's experiences during their admission in the penitentiary. Only a few mentions exist, suggesting they were not treated differently from men, and that no effort was made to preserve decency during the procedures. In the 1940s, it was observed that:

male and female prisoners are cared for in the same manner – that there is no provision made for safeguarding female prisoners during this stage from a moral standpoint. Records at the prison will show, only recently, of a case of seduction where the inmate clerk took advantage of a Negro female prisoner in the confines of the photograph room⁵⁶².

That sexual abuse was allowed to happen in this context is not surprising, given the lack of protection for Black women. Still, since it was known and recorded, this incident should have led to some kind of adjustment in the admission procedures. However, it took a decade, and maybe another series of unfortunate events like this, to bring about change at Angola. In 1951, an investigation of prison conditions revealed that “a woman prisoner while going through the receiving station about a year ago had been ‘physically molested’”. Consequently, “the penitentiary had changed their modus operandi and a woman guard was accompanying new female prisoners throughout the prison reception process”⁵⁶³. Long before LSP decided to implement what seems like an obvious solution, it had been standard practice elsewhere. For instance, in 19th century Quebec City common gaol:

it seems more than likely that matrons would have been involved in the admission of women, and especially in such an intimate act as measuring them, given that the very reason for hiring a matron in the first place, according to the private association that initially funded the matrons, was out of respect for ‘public decency and good morals’⁵⁶⁴.

⁵⁶² Proposal for a survey at Angola, undated (ca.1944?), Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.1, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

⁵⁶³ “Women at Pen ‘Disturbing’”, *State Times Advocate*, March 13, 1951.

⁵⁶⁴ Fyson and Fenchel, “Prison Registers, Their Possibilities and Their Pitfalls: The Case of Local Prisons in Nineteenth-Century Quebec”, 179.

At Angola, however, the matron would take charge of the women only after the admission procedures were dealt with at the distant receiving station.

Borrowing Harold Garfinkel's terminology, sociologist Gwenola Ricordeau described the entrance into prison as a "degradation ceremony"⁵⁶⁵. Indeed, what women might have endured during their admission to LSP was a ritual aiming at the destruction of their previous identities and their transformation into prisoners, i.e. bodies under the control of the state. On top of exposing women to sexual violence or sexualized forms of violence, these procedures were humiliating, especially when performed in front of white male observers. What they experienced in the confined space of the admission office would influence their whole experience of incarceration, and amplify their feeling of danger in white-dominated spaces. The uncertainty of their lot in prison was encapsulated in this transformative first moment⁵⁶⁶.

4.2.3 Arriving at Angola's women's camp

Before 1932, the transfer from the Baton Rouge receiving station to Angola's women's camp did not necessarily occur immediately after new female prisoners went through these distressing admission procedures. A 1927-1933 receiving station register reveals a complex flow of prisoners back and forth between Baton Rouge, Angola and other locations⁵⁶⁷. It allows for a less static image of the penitentiary population than the admission registers suggest. It also suggests that comings and goings to and from each camp were probably kept in a separate logbook, so that each camp captain could count his prisoner population every day and keep track of upcoming discharges, disciplinary measures, and other incidents.

⁵⁶⁵ Garfinkel, "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies"; Ricordeau, "« Faire son temps » et « attendre »", 69.

⁵⁶⁶ Ricordeau, "« Faire son temps » et « attendre »", 60.

⁵⁶⁷ Receiving Station Register, Volume 13, 1927-1933, LSP Collection.

Not much is known about the conditions of transportation between the Baton Rouge receiving station and the penal farm at Angola. In 1904, a journalist described the transport on the steamboat *Natchez* of a white young woman sentenced to life among a group of fifteen prisoners heading to the state penitentiary. Whereas Savilla R.'s crime had previously been described as one of the "most horrible" ones (she had allegedly poisoned a white man), now that the woman was convicted, she was considered "misguided". Her appearance is described as already reflecting her suffering: her cheeks "wan and pale". According to the journalist, even the "hardened criminals" who were her travel companions on the *Natchez* pitied "this unfortunate and hapless daughter of Eve". Southern conventions characterized white women as virtuous, pure, and genteel. Due to their submissiveness social norms prescribed, they were perceived as fragile, and deemed worthy of chivalrous male protection. Savilla R. had briefly interrupted this narrative with the commission of her crime, however, she was quickly put back in her normative role where she could receive sympathy for the tragic fate awaiting for her at the penitentiary-plantation, a place considered fit for Black women, even those convicted of less serious crimes. Later, Savilla R. would benefit from the sympathy of the penitentiary authorities who recommended her for pardon, and she was discharged less than six years into her life sentence⁵⁶⁸.

Prisoners were usually stationed for a few days at the receiving station in Baton Rouge before being transported to their respective camps at Angola (some men were transferred to road camps, levee camps or to the other penal farms instead of going to Angola)⁵⁶⁹. Before 1932, individuals paroled, pardoned, or simply discharged after they had "done their time" (for more on this, see chapter 6) would be transferred back to the receiving station. Then, they would also exit the penitentiary system from the 'Walls', i.e. from Baton Rouge, where they could access transportation to their homes. Although motives of their movements are not always detailed in the registers, it seems that a significant proportion of prisoners were transferred from their camp to the receiving station in Baton Rouge. It was either for medical purposes (to get treatment or arrange surgery at the penitentiary general hospital also located in Baton Rouge, where men and

⁵⁶⁸ Entry 1718, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907, LSP Collection; "Poisoned to Death", *The Colfax Chronicle*, November 7, 1903; "Pathetic Scene at the State Penitentiary", *The Colfax Chronicle*, April 16, 1904.

⁵⁶⁹ For instance, in 1910, 727 men were assigned on average to levee building and 147 to road camps while 248 were at Hope plantation, 121 at Oakley, and 110 at Monticello. Source: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans.

women with serious conditions would stay), for parole hearings or to be transferred to another location (such as a road camp). Records suggest that some prisoners remained longer than others in Baton Rouge and received job assignments there. Although no criteria are clearly stated in the sources as to what determined who would be stationed at the receiving station instead of being sent to Angola or another labor camp, it appears that race and gender might have been crucial factors. At least in the early period, it seems it was contemplated to keep all white prisoners away from labor camps, where only Black prisoners would be sent. The Board of Control described the area surrounding the Baton Rouge penitentiary as “sufficient for housing and working 500 men, should the State in future years ever desire to put her white prisoners all within walls”, which was consistent with the prevalent idea that Black people were more fitted for outdoor work⁵⁷⁰. A few dozen white men were assigned to the tailor shop and shoe shop that was still in operation at the ‘Walls’. A few Black women would also stay in Baton Rouge to take care of the maintenance of the old penitentiary and its population or to serve as domestic laborers for penitentiary officials residing there (captain, surgeon, warden, superintendent). For instance, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, school teacher and housekeeper Elzada F. spent all her time at the receiving station where she was successively maid for its captain, general washerwoman and cook for the captain, before being paroled. Virginia H., cook by profession, also did all “her time” cooking for the captain of the receiving station, without going to Angola. The same situation applied to Olivia L., another cook by profession, who was employed for her skills by the penitentiary general manager before being paroled. Other women spent part of their sentence at Angola, and part at the ‘Walls’. Mattie J. took care of the laundry at the receiving station for two years before being transferred to Angola where she was also a laundress. The reverse happened to washer woman Jim Ann W. who spent a few years at Angola where she took care of the laundry for “free people” (i.e. staff and their families) before she was sent to Baton Rouge to cook for the warden. Likewise, Kattie S. attended the garden at Camp D at Angola before she was sent to Baton Rouge to be a maid to the general manager. She came back a few months later to Angola, and was assigned to care for the garden before she became the guard at Camp D, a trusty position only few Black women

⁵⁷⁰ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1902-1903, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 24.

occupied at LSP (more on this in the following section and in chapter 7)⁵⁷¹. These back and forths between Angola and Baton Rouge would stop in early March 1932, when all penal operations were transferred to Angola and all Baton Rouge installations closed down⁵⁷².

Given the circumstances of this initial moment of admission in the LSP environment, it is only logical that many white and Black women's main feeling upon arrival was fear⁵⁷³. Whether women prisoners were 'delivered' to Baton Rouge or to Angola certainly impacted their sense of what their penitentiary experience would be for the months or years to come. For all the ones who would do their time on the penitentiary-plantation, the arrival at Angola was certainly reminiscent of what their ancestors might have told them about slavery. Like their enslaved ancestors, these women lived on a huge plantation, remote from everything else, where they were kept in captivity, and forced to survive. For the ones coming from rural parts of Louisiana, especially farm laborers in the cotton or sugar parishes, this landscape might have resembled what they had experienced first-hand in their life before incarceration. For others, it was probably more of a shock⁵⁷⁴. For Bertha W.M., Angola encapsulated the ongoing erasure of the Indigenous people she identified with, and the exploitation of her African ancestors she tried to distance herself from⁵⁷⁵.

⁵⁷¹ Entry 14101, Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923; Entry 18057, Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928; Entries 18240, 18432, 18590, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929; Entry 19248, Volume 31, no. 18801-19450, 1929-1930, LSP Collection.

⁵⁷² "Operation of Pen Receiving Station To Be Abandoned", *The Shreveport Journal*, March 2, 1932. Annual savings of \$10,000 were anticipated, which was presented as the motive for the closing.

⁵⁷³ Richardson, "Women in Prison", 85, 97, 113, 122, 162.

⁵⁷⁴ For more on women prisoners' geographical origins, see Appendix C, table C.1, and Appendix E, tables E.1, E.2 and E.3.

⁵⁷⁵ Entry 9738, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916, LSP Collection.

Conclusion of chapter 4

Black women's lives in custody were shaped by legacies tied to the 'longue durée' history of Angola as a place, as well as its peculiar geography. When the penitentiary-plantation was opened in 1901, it already had all the features of a work camp, designed to extract labor from unwilling prisoners: not much had changed since early colonizers who had stolen that piece of land from Indigenous inhabitants and coerced enslaved African Americans to transform it into a profitable plantation. Angola's peculiar geography and remoteness offered ideal conditions for captivity. Its size also allowed for a strict control of prisoners' movements.

Individuals receiving a penitentiary sentence would first go through admission procedures designed to assess their classification, i.e. the labor assignment they would be given (before 1932, this would occur in the Baton, Rouge "Walls"), before being transported to their camp. Women went through those same procedures before being introduced to their new life quarters.

Away from home and away from all familiar spatial markers, all women would have to adjust to this new environment. They would be forced to learn the landscape, to assess the distances, and to create a mental map of their surroundings, all the while being restricted in their movements. The next chapter documents the main features of these spatial constraints.

CHAPTER 5

SURVIVING IN THE 'FORBIDDEN CITY'

Racial hierarchies have been first and foremost defined spatially. In his book *How Racism Takes Place*, scholar George Lipsitz argues that: “race is produced by space [and] it takes places for racism to take place”⁵⁷⁶. During Jim Crow, African Americans suffered daily humiliations and affronts in their contacts with whites in public and private spaces. These spaces included streets, stores, and streetcars, to name a few. Making eye contact with whites on the street could be considered belligerent. Another unwritten rule was that, as a Black person, one would have to make way for whites on the sidewalk. This testimonial from Lovie Mae Griffin highlights how much this everyday denial of place in the public space could lead to growing frustration among African Americans:

You know you walk down the sidewalk and often times, that happened in Memphis even too, they [white people] would lock arms when I was a girl going to school to keep you from passing by. They would make you step out in the street because they wouldn't let you by and then you'd have to step out in the street and come around them and get back up. And I'll admit that I got in trouble one time, a few of us, because we decided that day I am as good as you are. And we locked arms and we put our books in front of us and we said today I shall not walk on the street. And we took them books and we walked smack into them, books and all. And the lady called the officers and they fussed a little bit but Mother having been working, I was in Memphis when that was happening, having worked for some friendly rich people it was just like they didn't do anything because you know they did not let anybody mess with us⁵⁷⁷.

⁵⁷⁶ Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 5.

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with Lovie Mae Griffin (btvct04112), interviewed by Laurie Green, Memphis (Tenn.), August 15, 1995, Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South Digital Collection, John Hope Franklin Research Center, Duke University Libraries.

This example illustrates that: “the spatiality of racism was a central component of the social structure of racial hierarchy”, which reinforced itself during Jim Crow with the implementation of legal and extralegal measures to segregate whites and African Americans from the cradle to the grave⁵⁷⁸. Whereas, before Emancipation, “interracial contact, unwelcome as it might be on both sides, was unavoidable”, spatial practices changed dramatically after the Civil War and a major “transformation in how power [was] spatialized” occurred during Jim Crow⁵⁷⁹. David Delaney refers to Jim Crow segregation as “a process of fanatical hyperterritoriality”⁵⁸⁰. As a result, Black people were excluded from certain places (except when serving white people for instance in their homes, on streetcars, on Pullman cars). Places and facilities designated for African Americans were more often than not of inferior quality, reinforcing the humiliating dimension of segregation. According to Delaney, spatial segregation - “whether inferior duplication, compartmentalization, or exclusion, was used to clarify power relations and the dominance of whites in general over blacks in general”⁵⁸¹. Moreover, African Americans’ behaviors outside of Black spaces were governed by invisible rules that could change according to the places they were navigating, making them vulnerable to white retaliation. In an interview, Herbert Melvin Cappie, a Black New Orleanian who defined himself as a Jim Crow survivor, recalls the difficulties Black people faced as they navigated the color line:

[..] we knew our places and it was difficult to stay in our place because the place was not the same everywhere. The laws were different from town to town. Whereas you had to go in the back in this place the other place you could go in a division on the side. Some places you could integrate. It was difficult to know just what you were supposed to do at a given place⁵⁸².

The white press was inundated with negative stereotypes of African Americans who “did not know their place”. Jim Crow defined the spaces where they could navigate and how they should navigate these spaces. These hierarchies did not go unchallenged. However, throughout the

⁵⁷⁸ Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948*, 7.

⁵⁷⁹ Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948*, 95 The first quote is from C.Vann Woodward (quoted by Delaney).

⁵⁸⁰ Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948*, 96.

⁵⁸¹ Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948*, 97–98.

⁵⁸² Interview with Herbert Melvin Cappie and Ruth Irene Cappie (btvct07063), interviewed by Michele Mitchell, New Orleans (La.), July 2, 1994, Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South Digital Collection, John Hope Franklin Research Center, Duke University Libraries.

South, in rural and urban spaces, Black peoples' efforts to challenge these geographies were often met with verbal or physical violence. Individuals and sometimes entire communities were targets of physical attacks. Every white person was *de jure* deputized to police African Americans if they infringed on segregation, in public and private spaces⁵⁸³.

Crossing the color lines intentionally or inadvertently, or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time could result in serious consequences. When a small group of Black women came out of a Monroe dance hall in February 1927, their mere presence on the streets at night was recast as a signal of their alleged suspicious character. Arrested for vagrancy on their way home, they would be sent to jail for the night and then fined. Their vulnerability to law enforcement as Black women was hard to overcome, even as a group of friends⁵⁸⁴.

Black women were often considered "lewd" because of their race. Nevertheless, they took risks to assert their respectability. This is reflected in the case of Ella H. who was accosted by a 75-year-old white Catholic man, Joe Simon, in the streets of their hometown, Gueydan, in November 1952. Simon "made vulgar propositions" to Herbert who simply told him: "you leave me alone and I'll leave you alone". According to witnesses, Simon then "grabbed her by the arm"; to defend herself, Herbert "slapped him in the face with a coat". "Angered at the slap," Simon "swung at" her but "she dodged the blow and hit Simon on the chin with her fist" causing Simon to fall on the sidewalk. The fall was fatal to Simon and Herbert was charged with manslaughter. Unfortunately, the outcome of her trial is not known⁵⁸⁵. The event took place in the Vermillion Parish and Herbert was held at the Lafayette Parish jail while waiting for legal procedures to be completed, which suggests that authorities did not want to leave her in the local jail for fear of a mob (it is also possible that the Vermillion jail was not equipped to receive women). Maybe the fact that the witnesses were two local white men helped her self-defence case. However, the event was not framed as self-defence in all newspapers. *The Crowley Post-Signal* presented it as "an altercation [...] on the main street" and simply stated Simon had "accosted" her. The next day,

⁵⁸³ Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948*, 101.

⁵⁸⁴ "Negro Women Are in Toils Charged With Being Vagrants", *The Monroe News Star*, February 23, 1927.

⁵⁸⁵ LSP records are not available for this period, the newspapers are silent on this, and the Vermillion Parish court could not be visited for the purpose of this research.

the same newspaper issued an erratum. It was not to provide the details they had skipped that would explain Herbert's reaction, but rather they added the name of the dead man's daughter to the list of his grieving relatives. *The Crowley Post-Signal* also presented the man as a local resident, providing information on his church affiliation and cemetery, but portrayed Herbert simply as a "Negro woman", even though they were both from Gueydan⁵⁸⁶. By presenting the two protagonists in very different fashion, the newspaper acknowledged the white man's identity and life whereas it marginalized the Black woman's humanity. Furthermore, the deliberate omission of details on the altercation between Herbert and Simon provided a truncated account of the reality, leading the white reader to assume that the Black woman was both at fault of a serious outrage to white supremacy and guilty of a violent and premeditated crime.

The main argument defended in this chapter is that the spatiality of the prison was a reflection of the broader spatial politics of segregation. In other words, inside the penitentiary, gender and racial hierarchies were defined along spatial terms as much as they were in Louisiana streets and other spaces in the 'free world'. Inside the penitentiary, rigid racial and gender hierarchies would also be enforced by whites and contested by African Americans along spatial dimensions. One of the other central features of Black women's spatial experiences at Angola is that they were held captive in female-only quarters, surrounded by male-only quarters. Therefore, their experiences of space would be quite different than that of other women confined in female-only reformatories or penitentiaries usually staffed by women. During the first half of the 20th century, several institutions were built on the "cottage model", supposedly to evoke the warmth and comfort of the home. This was the case for the first federal penitentiary for women, opened in Alderson, Virginia in 1927. "Beautifully located", and with "splendid equipment" the carceral environment at Alderson was thought to "give them [prisoners] a vision and a desire for a right living" and transform "fallen women" into model housewives⁵⁸⁷. Exploring the spatial experiences at Angola women's camp will help us understand how far they were from this rehabilitative ideal.

⁵⁸⁶ "Negro Woman Fights Against Attack by White Man in Gueydan; Man Dies of Fractured Skull", *The Abbeville Meridional*, November 6, 1952; "Negress Held In Death Of Gueydan Man", *The Daily Advertiser*, November 4, 1952; "Negro Woman Held in Death Of Gueydan Man", *The Crowley Post-Signal*, November 4, 1952; "Crowley Woman Among Survivors Of Gueydan Man", *The Crowley Post-Signal*, November 5, 1952.

⁵⁸⁷ U.S. Congress, Federal Penal and Reformatory Institutions. Hearings before the Special committee on federal penal and reformatory institutions, House of representatives, Seventieth Congress, second session, pursuant to H. Res 233, Seventieth Congress, first session, directing a committee to make a survey and report upon the care and

Before examining the dynamics at play in the women's camp and some of its spaces, particularly its racially segregated dimension, this chapter explores the issue of the "problematic" cohabitation between sexes within the penitentiary as revealed in official sources. After establishing what shaped the space Black women were confined to, this chapter documents the resistance deployed by Black women to overcome spatial boundaries. Their resistance took place in different locations within the penitentiary. A closer look into the dining room will allow us to comprehend their daily challenges. Although probably all of the women thought about escaping at some point during their incarceration, only a few of them exercised illicit mobility and attempted to run away. For the majority of these women, Angola was a temporary place, which without question left its mark on them. However, some of them never left the penitentiary grounds. Chapter 5 closes with a tribute paid to the women who died while incarcerated and whose bodies were buried there.

5.1 A female quarter in a male penitentiary

In May 1922, when the levees broke at Angola and the waters rose on the penitentiary-plantation, male prisoners rescued their female counterparts in a chivalrous manner. While sixty women were working in the fields, "the men paid no attention to the wall of water but smashed toward the women and literally carried them to points on the levee not then threatened"⁵⁸⁸. A Monroe citizen pleaded for parole for "the heroic men" who saved the women from drowning⁵⁸⁹. This

employment of federal prisoners, agreed to May 28, 1928. January 7, 1929 to January 15, 1929., 24; On Alderson, see: Bryan, *Inside*; Giallombardo, *Society of Women*; Filo, "Reclaiming Those Poor Unfortunates."

⁵⁸⁸ "Men at Convict Farm Heroes, Says Head", *The Monroe News-Star*, May 18, 1922.

⁵⁸⁹ "Parole 'Heroes of Angola' Is Dawkins Plea", *The Monroe News-Star*, May 20, 1922. After the flood, all prisoners had to be rescued later by boats and barges. A few hundred of them were brought to LSU agricultural campus (Greater Agricultural College) where they were housed in tents. A week later, prisoners were put to work on the LSU site to build temporary frame buildings that would house them as well as to build roads through the site, and start cultivation of corn and sweet potatoes. The incarcerated women were brought along sick prisoners to the Baton Rouge receiving station. Early August, their return to the penal farm was announced. Sources: "Break on Bob's

event was exceptional in more than one way. The men's "spontaneous" movement towards women due to the emergency of the situation caused by the flood might have provoked some positive reactions. However, relations between men and women incarcerated at Angola were far from being sanctioned by penitentiary authorities under normal circumstances. On the contrary, for six decades, an almost constant questioning about the risks it entailed and the space they occupied marked women's presence in the institution, albeit in a separate camp.

According to historian Anne M. Butler, reformers advocating for women prisoners had trouble obtaining the creation of separate institutions. Conflicting views on the role of prisons (retribution v. reformation), as well as limited funds dedicated to carceral institutions, took precedence over women's needs, especially when they were deemed criminals who "violated the patterns of womanhood". In 1911, reformer Isabel C. Barrows called for a national census to calculate the number of women incarcerated in mixed-sex county jails, a request that was brushed aside⁵⁹⁰. As a consequence of this disregard, female custodial institutions appeared slowly in the country, the first being a woman's state prison built in Indiana in 1873. In the South, this development occurred even later. The first Southern state to open a female institution was Arkansas in 1920 with the Farm for Women, although female prison camps existed in the late 19th century in different states, including Georgia⁵⁹¹. In 1910, sixty-one percent of the nation's female prisoners were sentenced to (unisex) state prisons, as opposed to women's reformatory institutions; by 1923 this proportion had declined to forty percent⁵⁹². In 1931, the Wickersham Commission reported that half of the states still kept convicted women in men's prisons and

Bayou Levee Flooding Angola State's Loss A Million", *Weekly Town Talk*, May 20, 1922; "Convicts to Till Site of L.S.U. and Greater College", *Clarion-Progress*, May 27, 1922; "\$1,500,000 Damage Faced as Angola Levee Gives Way", *The Times-Picayune*, May 18, 1922; "Angola Plantation Rapidly Getting Back to Normal", *State Times Advocate*, August 1, 1922.

⁵⁹⁰ Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West*, 32.

⁵⁹¹ Table 2.1 State and Federal Correctional Institutions for Women, 1873-1975 in Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers*, 144-45.

⁵⁹² Bureau of the Census, *Prisoners, 1923* [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926], 47, tables 19 and 20. Quoted in Dodge, *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind: A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835-2000*, 296.

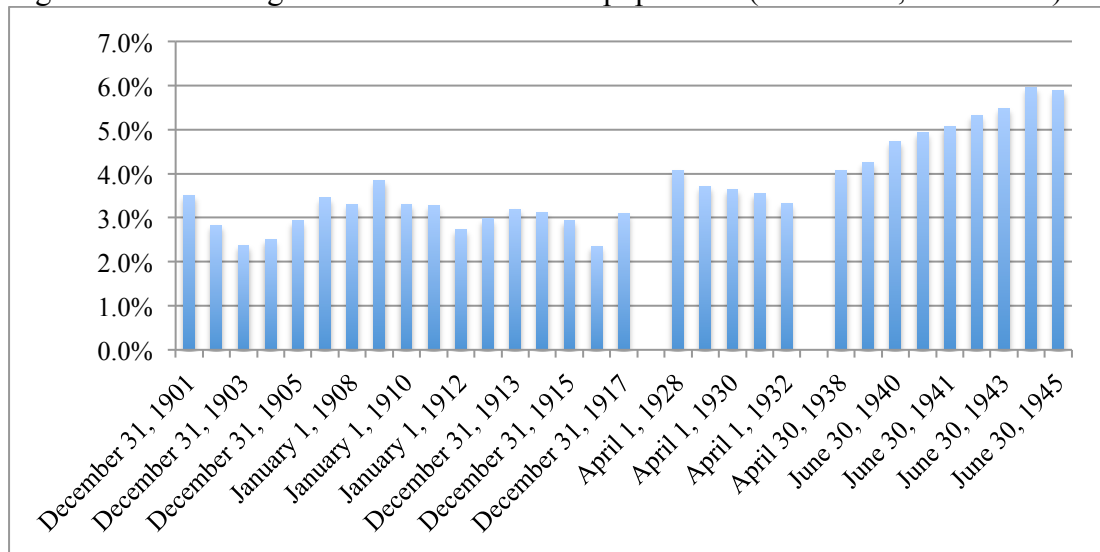
“recognized [this] as an undesirable practice”⁵⁹³. Therefore, Louisiana was far from being a unique case⁵⁹⁴.

As in other penitentiaries around the country, the female population at LSP represented only a small fraction of the total carceral population of Louisiana. The following figure shows that the lowest point was reached at the end of 1903 with 2.4 percent of LSP prisoners being women and the highest point at the end of the fiscal year 1943-1944 with 6 percent. The second figure below presents numbers drawn from LSP “census reports”, which were likely to exclude individuals on parole or those absent from the institution for other reasons. A 1956 document issued by the Department of Institutions about the 1940-1955 period stated: “The number of female inmates on record regularly composed only three to four percent of the entire prison population. In fact, the female population [...] decreased greatly from 1940 to 1955” from 117 Black and 17 white women to respectively 59 and 16. No explanation was provided for this trend.

⁵⁹³ U.S. National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (Wickersham Commission), *Report on Penal Institutions, Probation and Parole*, 55.

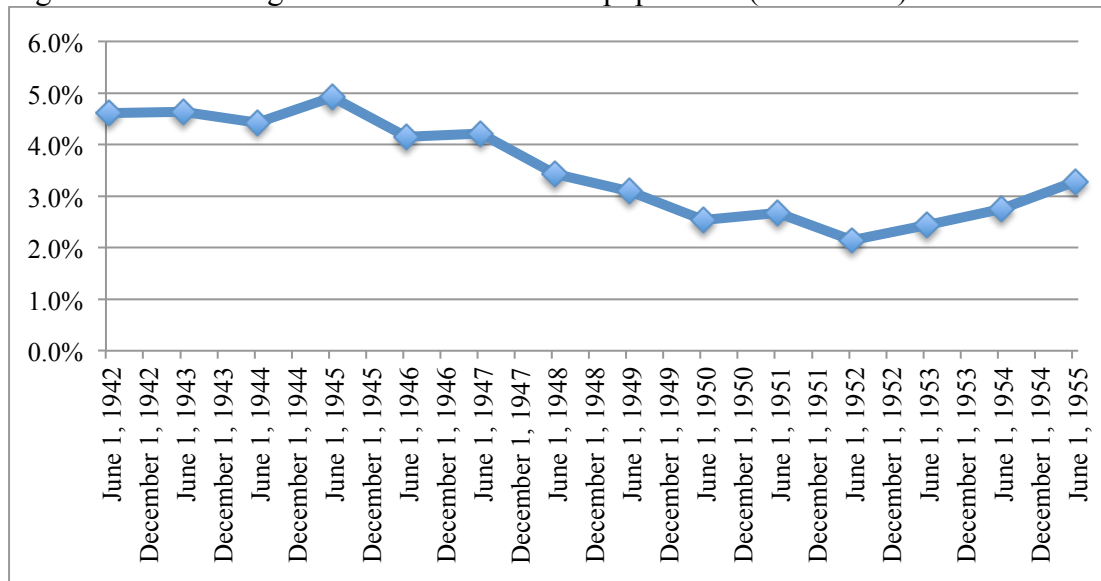
⁵⁹⁴ Dodge, *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind*, 138.

Figure 5.1: Percentage of women in total LSP population (1901-1917, 1928-1945)



Sources: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901; Biennial Report Calendar Years 1902-1903; Biennial Report 1904-1905; Biennial Report Calendar Years 1906-1907, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1908-1909; Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans; Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial report Calendar Years 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans; Report made by Hy. L. Fuqua, General Manager of the State Penitentiary to the Governor and General Assembly of Louisiana for the Regular Session of 1918 Covering the Biennial Period of 1916 and 1917, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Report to His Excellency, The Honorable O.K. Allen Governor of Louisiana and to The Honorable Senators and Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana, May 1932, Call number 365.3 La, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans; Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936; Biennial Report 1936-1938; Biennial Report 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; Report of the Department of Institutions of the State of Louisiana for the year October 1940-1941, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888r, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans; Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1943-1944, State of Louisiana, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1944; Louisiana Institutions, Annual Report 1944-1945, State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC.

Figure 5.2: Percentage of women in LSP total population (1942-1955)



Source: Statistics on carceral population, undated. Folder September-December 1955, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Ed Grant Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

The numbers of women at LSP varied between 30 and 224 individuals over the 6-decade period (1901-1961). The population exceeded 100 women during the Great Depression and declined after World War II⁵⁹⁵. By comparison, in the 1890 census, the number of non-white female prisoners with felony convictions nationwide was 1,972 (of a total of 24,277 non-whites and an overall total of 82,329 adults)⁵⁹⁶. In 1910, there were 2,468 African American women among the 110,319 incarcerated non-white adults nationally and they were overrepresented among women (40 percent of women being African Americans)⁵⁹⁷. In 1923, women made up only five percent of the adult prison population (5,192 of 103,883). That same year, the number of African American women was not disclosed, but 31 percent of the population in U.S. penal institutions was Black⁵⁹⁸. In 1935, the number of individuals confined to U.S. state and federal prisons and reformatories was 138,316, but the number of Black women was not provided in census

⁵⁹⁵ See Appendix D for a detailed table presenting numbers of women within the LSP population (table D.1).

⁵⁹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *Report on Crime, Pauperism and Benevolence in the United States at the Eleventh Census : 1890, Part I*, 1896, quoted by Thompson, "African American Women and the U.S. Criminal Justice System : A Statistical Survey, 1870-2009", 293.

⁵⁹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, *Bulletin 121: Prisoners and Juvenile Delinquents, 1910, 1914*, quoted by Thompson, 294-95.

⁵⁹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1930, quoted by Thompson, 296.

reports⁵⁹⁹. In 1940, 29 percent of women in prisons and reformatories, and 39 percent of women in jails and workhouses were non-white females. There were nearly 7,000 non-white female adult prisoners nationally out of a total of 317,168 individuals incarcerated either in U.S. prisons or reformatories (217,919) or in local jails or workhouses (99,249)⁶⁰⁰. In 1950, there were 5,338 non-white adult female prisoners nationally out of a total of 270,000 adults confined in U.S. correctional facilities (180,000 juveniles and adults in prisons and reformatories, and 90,000 in jails and workhouses). They made up more than 40 percent of the female carceral population nationally⁶⁰¹. In 1960, most of the 346,015 U.S. prisoners were incarcerated in state prisons. There were a total of 7,961 non-white female adults incarcerated, who made up over 40 percent of the female prisoners nationally⁶⁰².

LSP yearly female admissions also fluctuated greatly in the first half of the 20th century. In 1955, officials reported that: “Female commitments to Angola make up only about 3 to 4% of total yearly admissions. There has been a tendency for the number of female admissions to decrease”⁶⁰³. This same trend was also observed over the period 1901-1935, as shown in the table below.

⁵⁹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1937, quoted by Thompson, 296.

⁶⁰⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Special Report on Institutional Populations 14 Years Old and Over*, 1943, quoted by Thompson, 296.

⁶⁰¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Special Reports Institutional Population, 1950: Population Census Report P-E no. 2C*, 1953, quoted by Thompson, 297.

⁶⁰² U.S. Census Bureau, *United States Census of Population, 1960: Inmates of Institutions*, 1963, quoted by Thompson, 297–98.

⁶⁰³ Statistics on carceral population, undated. Folder September-December 1955, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Ed Grant Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

Table 5.1: Female admissions compared to total admissions

Decade	Total penitentiary admissions	Total female admissions	Female admissions as % of total
1901-1909	5,459	218	4.0%
1910-1919	6,884	294	4.3%
1920-1929	7,027	290	4.1%
1930-1935	7,079	259	3.7%
Total period	26,449	1,061	4.0%

Source: Angola Women's Database

Women prisoners were housed in a distinct camp on the penitentiary-plantation. The first female quarters, called Camp D, were located in the center of the property, a mile away from other (male) camps⁶⁰⁴. In 1956, Camp D was replaced by another camp, the “Willows”, also located within the perimeter of the penitentiary but further away from male camps. Both were nicknamed “the Forbidden City” to allude to the fact that men were prohibited from approaching women and their camp. In theory, “the unit [was] off limit [sic] to male LSP’ers”⁶⁰⁵. However, this metaphor serves to hide the reality that women’s living accommodations were always accessible to male staff. They were often also accessible to (some) male prisoners coming to deliver or carry out goods or equipment, to execute maintenance tasks or to fix installations. At Angola, male prisoners performed all construction work, as well as plumbing and carpentry.

It is plausible that many of these men did not restrain themselves in regard to women prisoners and attempted to have contacts, including of a sexual nature, with them. One could assume that, in this very uneven power context, guards or captains could promise women money or favors, or offer to assist them with an early release in exchange for sexual favors. They could also threaten and force reluctant women to have sex with them and easily get away with it. Pragmatism might have convinced some incarcerated women that compliance could be more beneficial than resistance. Exercising their agency did not necessarily meant resisting the unavoidable, but rather

⁶⁰⁴ In 1901, only three male camps were built: A, B, and C for a total of 450 men. B was the only white men’s camp.

⁶⁰⁵ *The Angolite*, March 12, 1955.

could mean that Black women would consciously negotiate the terms of unwanted sexual transactions.

Throughout the period 1901-1961, concerns arose in Louisiana on this unfortunate situation, particularly when investigations of penitentiary conditions were conducted. In December 1943, Lewis E. Lawes, penologist and former warden of the Sing Sing State Prison in New York and acting Chief Business Consultant for the War Production Board, made an inspection at Angola. His conclusions were that: “The Women’s camp is delapidated [sic] and should be rebuilt but not on its present site. It should be removed from the men’s prison camps for reasons which are obvious to anyone”⁶⁰⁶. Without being explicit on the troubles that the women’s close presence to male prisoners caused or could cause, Lawes suggested not a removal from Angola but a mere distancing of the women’s camp: “it should be moved from the center of the prison to a better location. After all there is plenty of land”⁶⁰⁷.

Others who surveyed the conditions at Angola recommended removing the women’s camp altogether. In October 1943, Governor Sam Jones had appointed an investigation committee to study penal, youth and mental institutions. Its Subcommittee on penal institutions, chaired by Catholic Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel, visited Angola for two days and interviewed staff and officials. They also had “full and free conversations with inmates”, at least from the committee’s perspective⁶⁰⁸. The subcommittee delivered its recommendations to the Louisiana Board of Institutions only a few days prior to Governor Jimmie Davis’s election in May 1944. They recommended “to provide for a separate Women’s Division at a location removed from Angola –

⁶⁰⁶ Lewis E. Lawes to W.K. Mitchiner, Confidential letter, 16 December 1943, Box 184-26, Folder 215.1, Legislation and Draft or Report, Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

⁶⁰⁷ “Lack of Rehabilitation Work Seen as Greatest Weakness of State Prison Farm by Lawes”, *The Morning Advocate*, December 11, 1943.

⁶⁰⁸ Visits and meetings were held at LSP on February 1st and 2nd 1944. Meetings were held with the General manager (W.T. Mitchiner), the warden (D.D. Bazer), three camp captains (Chambers, Higginbotham, Richardson), the two chaplains (Baptist minister Reverend John H. Smith, and Catholic priest Reverend L.E. Marionneaux), four members of the parole staff (Davidson, Winkler, Landry, Picou), the visiting physician (formerly Dr. Myron E. Walker), the former business manager (Ed Voelker), and several other employees.

perhaps at Idlewild Plantation”⁶⁰⁹. A Bill proposing to establish the Division at Idlewild near Clinton, Louisiana (East Feliciana parish) no later than May 1, 1946 was presented and defeated in June 1944, and that project never took shape⁶¹⁰. Warden Dennis D. Bazer evoked another solution during the survey: to vacate camp G, one of the men’s camps that was further from the other camps, and move women there temporarily. But that plan did not come through either. The removal from Angola was what was best, given that: “The main reason you don’t want it [the women’s camp] here on the farm is the fact that once in a while the boys and girls get together”, Angola physician Myron A. Walker explained, adding: “That is understandable, and the circumstance is undesirable”⁶¹¹. As the male prisoners were the majority in numbers as well as the main concern for most LSP officials and staff, the female prisoners were considered the disturbing element to be removed. Furthermore, LSP officials and staff understood “a common sense of gender and the stress of sexual deprivation” which were expectations of masculinity in the carceral world as well as in the outside⁶¹². Business administrator Ed Voelker stated clearly he was in favor of removal of the camp: “It [the women’s camp] is a demoralizing influence on these men, and we have to have the strictest supervision, because you know when people get those kind of things in their mind they become very ingenuous”. Voelker went a step further declaring that he did not believe that men were “qualified to supervise women” and that no man should be permitted to work with women prisoners, suggesting that power relations between male staff and women prisoners could also easily lead to sexual abuse⁶¹³.

Governor Davis chose not to act on recommendations made to his predecessor, but solicited federal experts to survey Angola operations and installations. In early May 1946, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons delivered its recommendations in a report signed by Joseph Sanford, warden of the Atlanta federal penitentiary, and Charles Jenkinson, an engineer for the Federal Prison Industries. At the same moment that prison guards, police officers and U.S. Marines were violently

⁶⁰⁹ Advisory Committee to the Board of Institutions, Report, 23 April 1944, Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, 184-26, Folder 215.1, Legislation and Draft or Report, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans. Quote on page 6.

⁶¹⁰ Several years later, *The Angolite* evoked a rumored story of moving the female camp to Idlewild. See *The Angolite* Volume 1, no 33, October 31, 1953.

⁶¹¹ 1944 Hearings, 79-80.

⁶¹² Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West*, 69.

⁶¹³ 1944 Hearings, 105.

retaliating against “mutineers” who were asking for better conditions at Alcatraz federal penitentiary, using military weapons such as bazookas, mortars, and phosphorus smoke grenades, Sanford and Jenkinson advocated in their report for “sweeping changes” at Angola. Sanford wrote to the governor: “Our findings reveal that Louisiana falls short of desirable standards in its penal program in practically all respects”⁶¹⁴. Among their recommendations was the immediate removal of women prisoners from Angola, to be housed temporarily in another institution or in some of the larger Parish jails before the construction of a separate institution for women prisoners near Baton Rouge. The federal study also recommended that the new facility be staffed by professional women and supervised by “an Assistant Warden, a woman trained in social sciences”⁶¹⁵. Despite Governor Davis’ public endorsement of these recommendations, nothing was done for another ten years to move the women away from the penitentiary-plantation⁶¹⁶.

Removal of the women’s camp from Angola’s grounds was again recommended in 1951 after another investigation. Testimony from some of the sixty-six women incarcerated convinced the subcommittee on women that they “should be removed entirely” from Angola⁶¹⁷. According to Lorraine Goreau, managing editor of *The Lafayette Daily Advertiser* and chairman of the subcommittee, there was no sexual relationships between male and female prisoners, but women were a tantalizing presence:

we found little evidence of current immorality at the Angola women’s camp, but we were convinced by testimony of both women prisoners and free employes [sic] that their presence at the prison was a disturbing influence. [...] Women inmates denied sexual relations with male prisoners, subcommittee members said. But some women maintain

⁶¹⁴ “Alcatraz Convicts Spurn Demand For Surrender, Continue Fight With Marines, Guards at ‘Rock’”, “Sweeping Changes at Angola Prison Are Recommended Here”, *The Morning Advocate*, May 4, 1946.

⁶¹⁵ Sanford and Jenkinson, *State of Louisiana: Recommendations for Reorganization of the Penitentiary System, A Survey Report by the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons and Federal Prison Industries, Inc.*, 5, 27, 143. Quote on page 9. See also “Davis Asks Long-Range Program of Reform and Modernization at Angola”, *State Times*, May 3, 1946.

⁶¹⁶ “Sweeping Changes at Angola Prison Are Recommended Here”, *The Morning Advocate*, May 4, 1946.

⁶¹⁷ At the time of the investigation 2,700 individuals were detained at Angola, among them eleven white and fifty-five Black women. What prompted this investigation was a collective movement of white male prisoners who self-mutilated to denounce brutality and poor incarceration conditions in February 1951. Major changes occurred in the years following the incident that made national headlines: Louisiana recruited federal penologists to take over LSP operations, allocated an unprecedented budget to build a new prison compound with dorms lined up in rows in four units placed around a central walkway, and promoted rehabilitation of its prisoners.

contact with male convicts – ‘flags’ in prison slang – who were able to do them small favors⁶¹⁸.

The subcommittee proposed that women would be relocated on a “piece of property [purchased] some years ago for this purpose” where the construction of one building could suffice to host racially segregated quarters as well as a library, recreational facilities, and spaces for educational purposes, all equipment that the current camp lacked⁶¹⁹.

Despite these repeated recommendations, the women’s camp was not relocated for another few years. After the LSP built a new prison for its male prisoners in the early 1950s, the inadequacy of the female camp became more evident and harder to deny. Hiring of staff and cost per capita were of great concern. This was especially true after the completion of the new male prison that would become the best marketing tool that LSP could hope for to redeem its reputation. During 1954, the number of women prisoners had increased in Louisiana as well as around the country, which might have driven LSP officials to look for new solutions. However, the fact that the number of white women in the custody of the LSP had at some point during the year exceeded the number of Black women might also have been a strong motive to offer more adequate facilities and rehabilitation programs to women⁶²⁰. At the time, Louisiana considered the possibility of establishing a female custodial institution in common with other Southern states, and requested the assistance of the Council of State Governments to assess the feasibility of this project⁶²¹.

Debates at the first “exploratory conference” revealed that Southern states had similar concerns for the high cost of maintaining the status quo: all together, the seven states present at the

⁶¹⁸ “Women at Pen Disturbing”, *State Times Advocate*, March 13, 1951.

⁶¹⁹ “Ask For End to Politics at State Pen”, *State Times Advocate*, April 19, 1951.

⁶²⁰ Summary, Exploratory Conference on Incarceration of Adult Women Prisoners in the South Central States, folder 13, Collection P1981-497, State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁶²¹ The role of the Council of State Governments was not only to bring the states together to discuss the establishment of a female custodial institution, but also to solve technical issues, such as finding a constitutional frame that would allow for out-of-state incarceration of women all the while retaining the sending state’s jurisdiction over the prisoners. Another issue was how to ensure equality of treatment while guaranteeing to out-of-state prisoners all the rights they would have been entitled if incarcerated in their state. Source: Memorandum issued by the Council of State Governments, 14 April 1955, folder 13, Collection P1981-497, State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

conference were spending \$1 million on the custody of women prisoners⁶²². By combining several states' female carceral populations, a critical mass could be obtained in order to set up adequate installations where work, rehabilitation and recreational programs could be done at a lower cost per capita. The project was therefore envisioned as a solution to the logistical problems of confining small numbers of women among male populations in several state penitentiaries (under three percent in each state):

We do not have enough women to warrant building a large pretentious institution with the right sort of staff, and it is the feeling of a good many of us here that if several states were to go together we might do a real job for our women – thus far not done in our State of Louisiana⁶²³.

Concerns for prisoners' distance from their relatives and loved ones and the impact on their well-being, which would be a logical consequence of this interstate project, were quickly brushed aside by the Council of State Governments and did not appear again in any of the documents about the meetings:

a prisoner has no constitutional right to be incarcerated in a particular geographic location. [...] The only valid objection to out-of-state incarceration that can be made on the basis of familial or other ties is that it may make it more difficult for a prisoner to be visited by family or friends. However this is a geographic objection and has no necessary connection with state boundaries. From one end of a state to the other often is further than from many points within that same state to an institution in a neighboring state. Hence, it does not follow that incarceration under the [interstate female] compact will produce inconvenience even in this respect⁶²⁴.

Despite facing similar issues with their female carceral populations, not all states were interested in interstate cooperation. According to the press, at first, Oklahoma and Louisiana were the only “ardent supporters of the plan”⁶²⁵. Tennessee joined them to work on a tentative contract to set up a new prison with a capacity of 400, which would be built and operated by one state and to which

⁶²² The first meeting was held in New Orleans on October 22-23, 1954. Source: “Regional Prison”, *The Times-Picayune*, October 31, 1954.

⁶²³ Reed Cozart to the Council of State Governments, 25 June 1954, Folder 1954, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Ed Grant Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records 1952-1964, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁶²⁴ “South Central Interstate Corrections Compact”, Exploratory Memorandum issued by the Council of State Governments, April 1955, folder 14-15, Collection P1981-497, State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁶²⁵ “Women’s Prison Proposal Aired”, *The Times-Picayune*, October 23, 1954.

the other states would pay a per capita fee⁶²⁶. A committee for a “South Central Interstate Corrections Compact” was then formed by penitentiary officials from Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas, with the purpose of opening an institution “to provide adequate care and rehabilitation of women prisoners in the South Central States”⁶²⁷. A similar plan for interstate cooperation to house women prisoners existed in Western States, which could serve as a draft for the Southern states⁶²⁸. This cooperation received official support from the Louisiana Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs who had advocated for a separate prison for women⁶²⁹. Elected officials and penitentiary managers from Alabama, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Tennessee attended a second conference where they discussed several scenarios, including the building of a new facility in Joplin, Missouri or the conversion of the youth reformatory in Stringtown, Oklahoma⁶³⁰. In March 1955, Reed Cozart, assistant director of Louisiana Department of Institutions, declared to the press that the discussions might lead to the creation of three or four new women’s prisons in the region, and that Louisiana was considering associating with the neighboring states of Arkansas, Texas and Mississippi⁶³¹. The compact was later on the agenda of an all-day meeting between the members of the Committee, a day before the Southern Regional Conference organized by the Council in Gatlinburg, Tennessee on May 26-28, 1955. Unfortunately, neither the press reports nor the correspondence of the Department of Institutions discloses the directions those discussions took. The larger conference had opened with a speech from the U.S. director of Civilian Defence about the risk of nuclear attacks and the inadequacy of cities evacuation roads, and the press focused on the discussions on highways that followed this

⁶²⁶ “Three States Propose Joint Women’s Prison”, *State Times Advocate*, December 3, 1954.

⁶²⁷ Memorandum issued by the Council of State Governments, 14 April 1955, folder 13, Collection P1981-497, State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. Discussions were around the following scenario: prisoners from the eastern southern states would be sent to Alabama and the western southern states would send their prisoners to another location to determine in this region. Alabama had showed its interest in receiving prisoners from other states at their women’s facility, the Julia Tutwiler Prison, which had two additional dormitories that were currently used as a chapel and a recreation hall.

⁶²⁸ Summary, Exploratory Conference on Incarceration of Adult Women Prisoners in the South Central States, folder 13, Collection P1981-497, State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁶²⁹ M.O. Williams to the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, 25 May 1955, folder 14-15, Collection P1981-497, State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. See also “Business Women Advocate Joint Women’s Prison”, *The Morning Advocate*, June 8, 1955.

⁶³⁰ “Regional Prison For Women to Be Discussed”, *The Morning Advocate*, February 15, 1955. The second conference was held in Oklahoma City, on February 18-19, 1955.

⁶³¹ “State Approves \$10,000 Aid Hike To Lady of Lake”, *The Morning Advocate*, March 16, 1955.

chilling opening⁶³². In July of the same year, Edward Grant, the Department director was still evoking publicly a collaboration, this time with Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma⁶³³. However, the construction of a new female camp on Angola grounds had already been decided⁶³⁴. In December 1955, while the construction at Angola was under way, Grant “reminded Louisiana has taken the leadership in fostering the idea of an inter-state women’s prison” and declared “I feel we must take a positive and aggressive stand before anything ever will be done”⁶³⁵. Obviously no stand was taken, possibly because the new Louisiana governor, Earl K. Long did not agree to the interstate cooperation or did not consider the importance of a separate female prison when new quarters (‘the Willows’ mentioned above) were on the verge of being completed at Angola.

The place of women on the penitentiary-plantation discussed at the higher levels of LSP management was also a topic of conversation among male prisoners. William Sadler, former *Argus* editor (and future *Angolite* editor), wrote in 1943:

The women’s unit at Angola has long been a bone of contention, a sore spot and a trouble maker. [...] There are records extant at the penitentiary which need not be cited here, and which would convince the most casual that women should be segregated, entirely apart from contact with male prisoners. Here is a 100-acre patch of land adjoining the prison farm at Angola which could be used as a separate unit for female inmates. Too, there is ample room in the Tunica foothills east of the main farm property, but still within the bounds of the penitentiary, on which a women’s camp could be built. [...] The penitentiary has the material – manufactured at the farm – and a new unit could be speedily located and built⁶³⁶.

Contact between male and female prisoners was forbidden, but it still occurred on a regular basis. Despite the official discourse, Camp D was not a hermetically sealed space; male prisoners (as well as male staff) were coming and going to Camp D. These visits were sometimes commented in the prison newspaper. The following excerpt suggests that these visits could even present opportunities for men to attract women’s attention and favors:

C.J. Ancelet, attaché of the local Plumbing Shop, wants the girls at Camp D to know that when they wash those filmy brrrrffsks [sic] in hot water this winter they can thank

⁶³² “‘You’re Ready Or You’re Dead,’ CD Head Warns”, *The Knoxville Journal*, May 28, 1955.

⁶³³ “Penal System’s Progress Noted”, *The Times-Picayune*, July 29, 1955.

⁶³⁴ “Moving Day Set Monday At Angola”, *State Times Advocate*, July 26, 1955.

⁶³⁵ “Top Emphasis on Juvenile Problem Urged by Grant”, *The Morning Advocate*, December 2, 1955.

⁶³⁶ “Blueprint for New Angola”, *The New Orleans Item*, December 31, 1943.

him. For he's the guy (he says), who did the work on that boiler which will fix up the camp with hot water. Uh-h-h, he and a colored lad named Robert Lewis, that is⁶³⁷.

In 1917, a visitor to Angola reported on the dangers arising from illicit contacts for between male and female prisoners:

In the past it has been known for girls to give birth to babies two or three years after going to prison. Quite recently a trusty prisoner from an adjoining camp was shot dead as he was leaving the women's camp before sunrise. It was very freely stated to me that both guards and trusty prisoners were permitted access to the women's department⁶³⁸.

Errands on the penitentiary-plantation could be recast as opportunities to meet prisoners of other camps. In March 1953, *The Angolite* recounted the love story between "Perry" and "Ruth" (aliases) who met at Angola hospital. Entitled "An Angola Romance", the story occupied four full pages, which in itself, speaks of the exceptionality of such an occurrence. "Perry", convicted of forgery and sentenced to ten years, was assigned to work in the hospital as "something of a nurse, orderly and general flunkey". "Ruth" had also been convicted of forgery. They met when "Ruth" - a registered nurse in the outside world - accompanied a fellow prisoner to the hospital. Their "romance" "flourished despite the repression and the vigilance of the officialdom". Both were paroled the same year, and they finally "found love and happiness" and lived far from Angola. Although the article does not report the protagonists' race, an accompanying illustration suggests they were both white. This might have played a role in the portrayal of their romance, and its acceptance by the prison community⁶³⁹.

In the 1950s, the development of recreational activities gave more opportunities for contacts between incarcerated men and women. For instance, in February 1953, a minstrel troupe formed by Black male prisoners performed at several camps, including at Camp D⁶⁴⁰. In June of the same year, Black women from Camp D were authorized to attend a baseball game at Camp I. Their

⁶³⁷ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 30, October 17, 1953.

⁶³⁸ "Prison System Declared Breeder Of Far Worse Evils", *The Times-Picayune*, February 25, 1917.

⁶³⁹ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 3, March 1953.

⁶⁴⁰ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 3, March 1953.

presence did not go unnoticed⁶⁴¹. A few weeks later, a message from male prisoners appeared in *The Angolite*:

Dear Editor: We believe the girls enjoy seeing the ball games fully as much as we enjoy seeing them. But the past two Sundays we have played and haven't seen them and they tell us they haven't been out of their yard. Maybe they ought to call it the 'forgotten city' instead of the 'forbidden city'. CAMP I BALL FANS⁶⁴².

The following week, the Black women were back at the game, to the delight of the male prisoners: "BELLES SEE GAME. A bevy of belles from the Forbidden City were guests last Sunday at the All-Stars-Fortune game. All were reported to have enjoyed the outing"⁶⁴³. Two weeks later, they attended the baseball game at another camp creating disappointment and envy elsewhere on the penitentiary-plantation: "Us hereby invites the ladies (colored) from Camp D to come over here on Sundays and see the best colored team on Angola play ball. We know they been going to Camp A, but us is got the best grand-stand on the farm here. Camp C ballplayers". Their presence was very much anticipated, as much as their appearance was commented:

GALS SOAKED Tugged out in all the feminine frippery, finery, gewgaws which are allowable by local law some thirty or more sepia belles from the Forbidden City went home thoroughly bedraggled last Sunday after having been caught in the rain at the Camp A ballgame. Although their duds were dampened their spirits were not, and the girls were reported ready to go again last week, but whether to C or F or I or A depended on the powers that be, they declared⁶⁴⁴.

According to these accounts in *The Angolite* pages, women, Black and white, were the objects of the male prisoners' fantasies and rivalries, their presence at the ball games being commented in more length than the score of the games itself. Every upcoming celebration at Angola, such as Labor Day or Christmas, was an opportunity to express the hope of their presence among the men who formed the overwhelming majority of the incarcerated. When Ida Mae T., Evette S., and Lula Mae M. forming a "trio of songsters" participated in Labor Day festivities, they were of course welcomed with enthusiasm⁶⁴⁵. The participation of Black women Lizzie D. and Jeane G. as entertainers was also mentioned at the occasion of a musical show at Angola. Incidentally, a

⁶⁴¹ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 14, June 27, 1953.

⁶⁴² *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 16, July 11, 1953.

⁶⁴³ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 17, July 18, 1953.

⁶⁴⁴ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 19, August 1, 1953.

⁶⁴⁵ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 24, September 5, 1953.

few years prior, this show had featured Governor Jimmie Davis and his own musical band⁶⁴⁶. The mere presence of women at Angola, even from a distance, was titillating and tantalizing for the men as this incident suggests: “Gal Gandering Nets Cut Eye: Walter Pierre was looking at the gals from Camp D passing in the bus last Monday while attempting to load cane. A sling slung loose and whipped Walter over his right eye”⁶⁴⁷.

In his study of rhetorical practices of *The Angolite*, Scott Whiddon remarked that *The Angolite* (edited by a white man, and with contributions from other prisoners, mostly whites) often shared the same gender expectations than the penitentiary administration. Their idea was that men were lacking heterosexual relations and women were “simply positioned as a requirement in maintaining normalized masculinity”. Without the presence of women, it was assumed that men were left with no other choice but to turn to homosexual relations. These were labeled as “perversion” both in *The Angolite* pages and by the administration⁶⁴⁸. The remedy was then easy: “the companionship of the sexes” presented as “the very thing that makes for a normal life”. *The Angolite* suggested organizing an activity during which single “buds and blossoms at Camp D as well as a horde of male inmates at different units” could meet to “cast aside their single bliss”⁶⁴⁹.

A series of articles in *The Angolite* even fleshed out a more elaborate proposition Monthly “mixed inmate dances”, with the participation of male and female prisoners, were envisioned as a reform and rehabilitation method. To participate, one had to be eligible, “of course based on conduct record”⁶⁵⁰. Assumed “to be a conducive to a better morale and an incentive to behavior”, these dances were framed as an important penal innovation⁶⁵¹. A former LSP physician and a psychologist, who were “outside” readers of the newspaper, supported the idea. Their endorsement as medical experts certainly added legitimacy to the prisoners’ claims⁶⁵². Albeit audacious, the proposition of mixed dances did not threaten the racial order in place at Angola,

⁶⁴⁶ “Davis, Band Heard With Angola Show”, *The Times-Picayune*, April 9, 1946.

⁶⁴⁷ *The Angolite*, December 24, 1955.

⁶⁴⁸ Whiddon, ““To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest””, 230.

⁶⁴⁹ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 30, October 17, 1953.

⁶⁵⁰ *The Angolite*, Volume 2, no 1, Christmas Day, 1953.

⁶⁵¹ *The Angolite*, January 2, 1954, quoted in Whiddon, ““To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest””, 235.

⁶⁵² Whiddon, ““To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest””, 236.

since Sadler explicitly mentioned that they should be racially segregated: “a dance for the colored folks the first time; for the white next, and so on”⁶⁵³. The LSP administration listened to the plea made in *The Angolite* pages. In the spring of 1954, a dance was organized for Angola prisoners, “said to be the first of its kind in penal history”. Forty-six Black women and an equal number of Black men, and twelve white women and twenty-five white men participated⁶⁵⁴. The dance was set up as a reward for deserving participants, selected on the basis of their behavioral records. Due to the men/women ratio, we can only assume that the LSP administration was stricter in its selection for men. *The Angolite* reported on the exceptional event in the manner of “a social news column in a free-world newspaper, presenting such details as decorations and refreshments”. As could be expected, the event was segregated: white and Black prisoners were in the same room (the hospital kitchen transformed into ballroom) but alternated on the dance floor. Two bands provided the music: the Black ‘Rhythm Makers’ of Camp A and the white ‘Angolaires’ from Camp E. It seems that despite the success of the evening, this dance was a one-time experiment⁶⁵⁵.

Relations between men and women prisoners were essentially prohibited unless sanctioned by the LSP administration in spaces such as: the hospital, the baseball fields, and spaces where men and women sometimes labored together (for instance sugar cane fields, or the cannery). Unauthorized contacts also occurred, although only scarce traces can inform us about the spaces where they happened. A look at disciplinary remarks informs us of some of these unofficial contacts, and the implications for the women involved. On February 17, 1937, two white women were “blackmarked for smuggling uncensored mail to men prisoners”⁶⁵⁶. On December 30, 1956, after notes were found on a bus addressed to a Black woman, Gladys G., she was subsequently placed on “isolation on a restricted diet for an indefinite period”⁶⁵⁷. In 1957, Inez W., another Black

⁶⁵³ *The Angolite*, Volume 2, no 1, Christmas Day, 1953.

⁶⁵⁴ *The Angolite*, April 1, 1954.

⁶⁵⁵ Whiddon, “‘To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest’”, 237.

⁶⁵⁶ Entry #25214, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935; Entry # 25834, Volume 41, no. 25301-25950, 1935, LSP Collection.

⁶⁵⁷ Conduct report, 16 January 1959, Box 8, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

prisoner, was punished twice for “waving” to a male prisoner: the first time, she lost sixty days of good time; the second, she was placed on isolation for an “indefinite” period⁶⁵⁸.

Similar bans on contact existed in other carceral institutions. For instance, in the Bedford Reformatory archives, Saidiya Hartman found that Mattie, a young Black woman, was “punished for passing notes to a girl in another cottage. In the spring of 1918, she was sent to the Disciplinary Building for hiding stationery and stamps in her room”. Hartman rightfully remarked that Mattie’s “desire to write was so great that she was willing to risk punishment”⁶⁵⁹. An uncensored note or letter passed between prisoners clandestinely is called a ‘kite,’ evoking the fact that words can travel when and where people cannot⁶⁶⁰.

This ban might have been particularly challenging for women who had a loved one in one of the male camps. Here are a few examples retrieved from the admission records. Mary C. and her brother Shelly were both convicted of rape against a Black woman and sentenced to life in 1906. Shelly died at Angola in 1908 officially from “tuberculosis of the lungs”, whereas Mary was pardoned and discharged in 1910⁶⁶¹. One is left to wonder how Mary learned about Shelly’s disease. Or, if she had a chance to see her brother before he died?

In 1909, Delia D. and her husband Andrew, both “farm hands” in their twenties, arrived at LSP together with a one-year sentence for petty larceny and both left LSP on the same day⁶⁶². In 1913, Clara L. was sentenced for a year after she was convicted of being accessory to a murder allegedly committed by Williams L., possibly her husband or older brother. We will never know if Clara could even say goodbye to Williams when she left him behind in 1914. Or if she had any idea when she was discharged that he would not actually spend the rest of his life at Angola. He

⁶⁵⁸ Conduct report, 21 November 1960, Box 21, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁶⁵⁹ Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 75.

⁶⁶⁰ Appendix B in Giallombardo, *Society of Women*; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 75.

⁶⁶¹ Entries #3376, #3400, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907, LSP Collection.

⁶⁶² Entries #4890, #4891, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection.

would in fact be discharged after ten years, like most individuals with a life sentence in this period⁶⁶³. If so, was this even comforting to her?

In April 1919, Carrie L., then aged 14, entered the penitentiary with her 17-year-old brother Robert L. Both were sentenced in the Caddo parish for minor property crimes. According to the law, they should have been judged in a juvenile court and sent to a youth reformatory if convicted. Robert, sentenced to one to two years, was declared a juvenile by Judge John R. Land in June the same year and was ordered to be released from the penitentiary in December 1919. Carrie, on the other hand, was sentenced to two to three years, and was not recognized as a juvenile even if she was younger than her sibling. She would be discharged from LSP only in June 1921⁶⁶⁴. In 1935, another pair of siblings arrived together at Angola: Idolia “Toots”, a 23-year-old cook, and Leo G., a 25-year-old baker, both Catholic residents of the Acadia parish. They were convicted of “striking with intent to kill” and sentenced to one to three years. They both were paroled in May 1936 although Idolia had left Angola beforehand on a furlough⁶⁶⁵.

How would couples or siblings confined in different camps on the penitentiary-plantation communicate before the prison newspaper could be used as a messenger⁶⁶⁶? How would they share good and bad news and support each other in their hardships? Did they benefit from the connivance of fellow prisoners or even from some staff members? Did they rely on the prison grapevine for news or did they ever have a chance for direct contact? The answers are left to our imagination.

The intricacy of Black women’s experiences was sometimes exacerbated by the fact that they were labeled criminals by association with a loved one, or judged more harshly because of their loved one’s criminal reputation. It seems to have been the case for Frances G., who arrived at

⁶⁶³ Entries #8106, #8107, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916, LSP Collection.

⁶⁶⁴ Entries #11909, #11910, Volume 18, no. 9901-12855, 1916-1921, LSP Collection. The 1913 Constitution established a juvenile court in Louisiana although the deliberate ignorance of the judges of the provision of the law, as well as the deliberate failure of the legislature to vote for adequate budgets necessary to open new institutions for Black youth, ensured that Black juveniles were treated like adults, unlike their white counterparts, for the following decades.

⁶⁶⁵ Entries #25869, #25870, Volume 41, no. 25301-25950, 1935, LSP Collection.

⁶⁶⁶ According to a white woman interviewed by Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 130.

Angola in January 1933 with her husband Julius G., alias “Lawyer”. They were both convicted in the Ouachita parish of “burglary of a dwelling” and sentenced respectively to one and five years at LSP. Frances was 21 and declared her job was doing housework, whereas Julius was a 38-year-old saw mill laborer⁶⁶⁷. Julius had a bad reputation in Monroe, having been arrested and jailed locally several times beforehand, all of which might explain the severity of his penitentiary sentence. *The Monroe News-Star* contributed to his criminalization and bad reputation, exaggerating his troubles with justice⁶⁶⁸. He was said to have been arrested frequently over a period of fifteen years, and to have spent two-thirds of the period in jail. His alleged crimes were mostly of an economic nature. Considering that Julius probably stole items of small value as a means of survival, he was far from being the threat to the public the newspaper tried to present him as. It is also possible that all crimes perpetrated in the “chicken houses and coops of Monroe” were put on his back by unscrupulous police agents who wanted to solve cases easily⁶⁶⁹. *The Monroe News-Star* went as far as using Julius’ alleged criminal life as a benchmark, and compared other local and non-local thieves to his arrest record⁶⁷⁰. In addition to these petty crimes, Frances and Julius had also been both arrested in July 1932, along with another Black man, on charges of fighting⁶⁷¹. Julius was also charged in September 1932 with larceny of “a bedstead, a pair of bed springs, and a ham”, along with a male accomplice, resulting in their sentencing to the parish jail for six months⁶⁷². Obviously, Julius was discharged earlier, since at

⁶⁶⁷ Entries #23105, #23107, Volume 37, no. 22701-23350, 1932-1933, LSP Collection.

⁶⁶⁸ The press used several derogatory labels for Julius such as “Monroe’s most celebrated jailbird and chicken thief” or “the King of the Hen Roost”. It was common to present African Americans in derogatory ways, including as chicken thieves. Hollywood contributed to these racial stereotypes with silent movies such as *Chicken Thieves* (1897), *Who Said Chicken?* (1901), *Dancing for a Chicken* (1903), and *The Chicken Thief* (1904). The latter was photographed by G.W. Bitzer, who would be the future collaborator of D.W. Griffith, director of the infamous *Birth of a Nation* (1914). *The Chicken Thief* featured armed white farmers chasing Black fugitives. *Fun of the Farm* (1905) concludes with a Black man tarred and feathered after he was found stealing chickens. Source: Jackson, “The Celluloid War before The Birth: Race and History in Early American Film”, in: Barker and McKee, *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary*, 31.

⁶⁶⁹ “Funeral Rites Lure Green to Leave His Cell”, *The Monroe News-Star*, December 9, 1932.

⁶⁷⁰ “Lawyer Green Has Formidable Rival”, *The Monroe News-Star*, April 26, 1932; “Winsboro Claims Equal Of Monroe Chicken Thief”, *The Monroe News-Star*, October 13, 1932; “Jes’ Ramblin’ About the Town”, by H.H.B., *The Monroe News-Star*, August 25, 1933; “‘Lawyer’ Green Now May Have to Look for Laurels”, *The Monroe News-Star*, November 2, 1933; “Police Make Search for Lawyer Green”, *The Monroe News-Star*, November 12, 1937.

⁶⁷¹ “Lawyer Green Is Again In Trouble”, *The Monroe News-Star*, July 11, 1932.

⁶⁷² “Lawyer Green Has Formidable Rival”, *The Monroe News-Star*, April 26, 1932; “‘Chickens’ Again Are Downfall of Green”, *The Monroe News-Star*, September 10, 1932; “City Court”, *The Monroe News-Star*, September 13, 1932.

the end of November of the same year, he was arrested and fined for drunkenness (\$7.50) and for fighting (\$10). This time, his wife and another man were also arrested and fined⁶⁷³. Since he could not afford the fine, he had to serve ten days in jail (the sources do not mention if this was also Frances's case). His mother died during his time in the Monroe jail, and he requested authorization to leave the parish jail to attend her funeral. He also needed to raise money to get his only suit of clothes that had been pawned for \$2. He was arrested again the same day for stealing a bolt of clothes valued at 50 cents, plausibly to attend the funeral, but was not convicted⁶⁷⁴. No detail is available on the alleged crime that brought Frances and Julius to LSP and how she was made his (real or fictional) accomplice. They both pled guilty to a charge of "burglary of [a] dwelling in the day time" and were convicted on January 7, and were admitted to LSP nine days later⁶⁷⁵. Julius' penitentiary sentence "calculated to keep him away from Monroe for some time" was welcomed by the press, and framed as a "long rest" for Monroe police⁶⁷⁶. The local newspaper reproduced a short letter that he had supposedly written during his time at Angola to the Monroe police: "I am getting along very good but I think about home some time but I think the Lord will let me get bak [sic] home again". His acquaintance with Monroe police was apparently such that he wrote to the superintendent of police asking that he sent to him money and stamps at Angola⁶⁷⁷. He made no mention of his wife, a resident at Camp D until discharged in October 1933. Her name resurfaced only once in historical records, when she was arrested for being "drunk and disorderly" the following year⁶⁷⁸. Discharged in September 1935 from LSP, Julius was again arrested in October of the same year in Mississippi for carrying a concealed weapon, and was suspected of a robbery. He had allegedly committed the robbery with another Black man who also had a history of jail and penitentiary incarceration for stealing chickens and who had previously escaped the Monroe chain gang⁶⁷⁹. Monroe newspapers

⁶⁷³ "City Court Cases", *The Monroe News-Star*, November 29, 1932.

⁶⁷⁴ "Funeral Rites Lure Green to Leave His Cell", *The Monroe News-Star*, December 9, 1932; "City Court", *The Monroe News-Star*, December 10, 1932.

⁶⁷⁵ Indictments and Informations Records 1914-1963, Volume O, Ouachita Parish Clerk of Court, Monroe.

⁶⁷⁶ "Jes' Ramblin' About the Town", by H.H.B., *The Monroe News-Star*, January 20, 1933; "'Lawyer' green Now May Have to Look for Laurels", *The Monroe News-Star*, November 2, 1933.

⁶⁷⁷ "'Lawyer' Green Writes Tarver From La. 'Pen'", *The Monroe News-Star*, July 21, 1933.

⁶⁷⁸ "City Court", *The Monroe News-Star*, July 12, 1934.

⁶⁷⁹ "Monroe Negro Is Held in Prison at Jackson", *The Morning Advocate*, October 17, 1935; "Arrest Negro Who Escaped Custody in August, 1934", *Monroe Morning World*, October 27, 1935.

continue to report on Julius' arrests in the following years, even as he returned to Angola for another term in 1939⁶⁸⁰. The year before, Julius was a "roomer" in a Monroe boarding house. This suggests that, whatever their husband-wife relations were during and after her incarceration at Angola, the couple had separated. Frances, whose sentence to the state penitentiary (over jail time) was most probably the result of her association with a multi-recidivist, might have preferred to distance herself from Julius to avoid subsequent spillover effects. Their story exemplifies the ways in which Black individuals living in poverty, who had to resort to larceny and theft to make ends meet, could become the victims of a relentless campaign by law enforcement and justice courts. Newspapers would also contribute to this by relaying information on petty crimes and exaggerating Black individuals' criminal reputation. Frances' story also exemplifies the ways in which the criminal justice system often caught women in its net, and punished them for crimes perpetrated by their husbands, common-law husbands, lovers or male relatives⁶⁸¹.

This might also have been the case for Odelee M. D., a 19-year-old domestic laborer and cook, married to a 29-year-old school teacher. They both arrived in August 1928 at LSP. The husband was sentenced to life after a murder conviction, while the wife's conviction of manslaughter resulted in a sentence of six to twenty-four months. She left Angola on parole in September the following year, leaving behind her husband who would be granted a full pardon in April 1936⁶⁸².

Some white women also arrived at LSP with a male relative or partner as their alleged accomplice, one who would be detained in white men's camp while they were at Camp D. However, a few white women were in a different and peculiar situation, as they arrived at the state penitentiary with a Black man. This status might have made for additional challenges for them in trying to keep in touch with their loved ones. In 1913, the East Baton Rouge parish convicted two white women, Minnie G. divorced, and Lena A. married, and two Black men, Fred

⁶⁸⁰ "Lawyer Green Wanted for Restaurant Theft", *The Monroe News-Star*, December 23, 1935; "Police Make Search for Lawyer Green", *The Monroe News-Star*, November 12, 1937; "City Court", *The Monroe News-Star*, January 18, 1938; "Lawyer Green Arrested", *Monroe Morning World*, September 26, 1937.

⁶⁸¹ Carol Lee Fenster, "Characteristics of Females Arrested with Males in Crime Partnerships" (Paper presented at the Western Social Science Association, 1977) quoted in Feinman, *Women in the Criminal Justice System*, 22.

⁶⁸² Entries #18112, #18113, Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928, LSP Collection.

P. and Robert T. for concubinage. Due to Louisiana law on interracial relations, their alleged love affair had cost them a high price: the first couple was sentenced to five years, the second to one. The governor paroled Minnie and Fred in 1915 on the same date. Lena and Robert did their time at Angola, minus the good time. For his work at the sugar refinery (which was usually time-sensitive during harvest and therefore quite demanding), Robert was released a month earlier than Lena. In 1925, the East Baton Rouge parish convicted Blanche B. and Henry S., both single, on the same charge of concubinage, and sentenced the 28-year-old white stenographer and the 24-year-old Black laborer to nine months⁶⁸³. Did any of them have a chance to see their lovers during their time on the penitentiary-plantation? Did they even desire to see them when their relationships were the cause of their troubles in the first place? Were these white women and Black men able to get any sympathy or collaboration from other prisoners in order to get in touch with their lovers? Clues suggest that these white women's position at Camp D might have been delicate. According to *The Angolite*, in July 1936, four white women were admitted under the same charge of concubinage. Their white camp-mates "rebelled" against them and demanded that the newcomers be housed separately. Four of these rebellious women ended up in solitary confinement as a result⁶⁸⁴. This certainly gives an indication of how much individuals who crossed the color line were despised and how far those who defended white supremacy were ready to go to uphold their ideals.

As discussed above, one of the essential features of the women's camp was its relatively close distance from male camps, which was always considered as problematic since relations and contacts between prisoners of opposite sexes were strictly forbidden. Turning our gaze to the spaces inside the women's camp in the following sections, we will consider another feature of Camp D, i.e. the racial segregation between Black and white women. This will allow for an examination of the housing conditions granted to Black women and white women in their separate quarters. This comparison provides some clues on how the penitentiary was inscribing racial and gender hierarchies into space. In the following chapter, it will also appear that this effort was not only spatial: Black women's time was devoted to different activities than their

⁶⁸³ Entries #7788, #7791, #7855, #7856, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916; Entries #15637, #15638, Volume 26, no. 15501-16150, 1926, LSP Collection.

⁶⁸⁴ William Sadler's Angola Diary "Lest we forget" account of 1936 published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 17, July 18, 1953.

white counterparts, making it clear that these two groups had very distinct experiences of their incarceration at Camp D.

5.2 Segregated housing conditions

Built when Louisiana acquired Angola, Camp D consisted of a group of three wood-planked buildings, which Warden W.H. Reynaud did not hesitate to present as “splendid quarters in the middle of the plantation”⁶⁸⁵. This statement reveals his attitude towards state prisoners’ welfare, which should not come as a surprise. After all, Reynaud had been warden during the convict leasing system, a charge that, at the time, implied inspecting Louisiana labor camps. Reynaud had always approved their conditions even when these conditions resulted in a high death rate among the coerced laborers who suffered from the lack of hygiene and the lack of food, as well as the overwork and brutal treatment that characterized these camps.

⁶⁸⁵ “Convict Farms Doing Well”, *Daily Picayune*, May 14, 1901. W.H. Reynaud had been warden under the convict leasing system when his role was to inspect camps and to insure the welfare of state prisoners. Source: *Daily Advocate*, August 28, 1896.

Figure 5.3: Camp D in 1901



Source: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Used with permission of Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University.

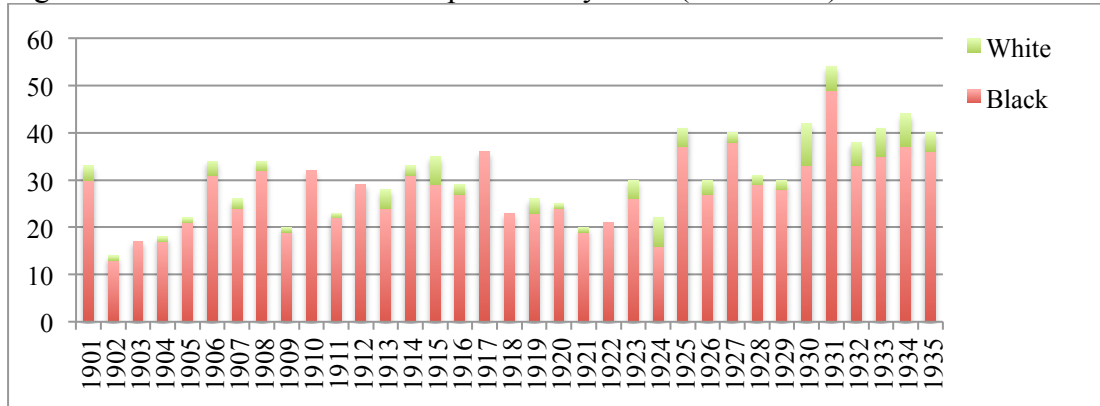
Camp D was originally built for fifty women, and was sufficient to house over thirty African Americans and the one single white woman who were there in 1901. These two groups were housed in different buildings: Black women in the building on the far left of the photograph above, and white women in the building on the far right, the building in-between being used as a barn. Over time, Camp D was expanded to meet the needs of a growing female carceral population.

Over the period 1901-1935, 1,061 women were admitted to the Louisiana State Penitentiary. According to official reports, another thousand women were admitted to Angola over the following 25-year period, i.e. before the creation of a female-only penitentiary in Louisiana⁶⁸⁶. As

⁶⁸⁶ See Appendix D for a detailed table of the number of women admitted per year (table D.2).

a comparison, a total of 61 women were admitted to the Baton Rouge penitentiary between 1835 and 1862; sixty percent were Black, and half of these were enslaved and were convicted of murder or *Code Noir* offences⁶⁸⁷.

Figure 5.4: Women's Admissions per Year by Race (1901-1935)



Source: Angola Women's Database

As shown in the above figure, an overwhelming majority of the women admitted to LSP over the period 1901-1935 were African Americans (91 percent), while whites always constituted a small minority⁶⁸⁸. No other ethnic group was represented among the female penitentiary population apart from one woman admitted in 1915 who was of Indigenous and perhaps African descent, and one Black women whose father was born in the Philippines⁶⁸⁹. Yearly admissions varied from 13 to 49 African American women (the average and median being 28 individuals) while white women's yearly admissions varied from none to 9 (the average being 3 individuals and the median 2). No white woman was admitted for six non-consecutive years over the period (1903, 1910, 1912, 1917, 1918, and 1922), only one individual for 7 non-consecutive years, and only 2 for 7 other non-consecutive years. As a comparison: "Parchman had 2 white females and 32 black female prisoners in 1922. This was the first year, since 1913, that white women reappeared in prison records". These numbers brought historian Telisha Dionne Bailey to

⁶⁸⁷ Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women, Part 1: 1835-1901", 42, 47.

⁶⁸⁸ See Appendix F for a detailed table of the number of women admitted per year by race and ratio of female admissions (table F.1).

⁶⁸⁹ Bertha W.S. was already evoked in Chapter 4. Entry 9738, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916, LSP Collection. Dorothy G. appears in Chapter 8. Entry #18308, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929, LSP Collection.

conclude that: “For several years, either the penal system imprisoned no white women or intentionally omitted them from their records, yet the stark contrast between the number of white and black women incarcerated is shocking”⁶⁹⁰. David M. Oshinsky found out that the female population at Parchman ranged from twenty-five to sixty-five Black women and from zero to five white women each year. His research demonstrated that some white women were spared a prison term after committing a crime, even when they had confessed⁶⁹¹.

At LSP, the later years of the studied period seem to be marked by an increase of the white women’s admissions, resulting in a decrease of the share of Black women among the female prisoners: they represented 77.8 percent of female admissions in 1955-1956 and only 59.1 percent in 1961-1962⁶⁹². Unfortunately, no individual data on admissions is available after 1935. We can only speculate that, in later years, more poor white women were caught in the criminal justice system for offenses related to narcotics, as a consequence of a strengthening of repression against drug use in Louisiana (as well as in other states)⁶⁹³.

As it is the case in other studies related to women’s incarceration in the U.S. at the turn of the 20th century, women of African descent constituted the largest share of the female carceral population at Angola, which suggests racist trends in policing and sentencing, i.e. police forces disproportionately targeting Black women and courts being more clement with white women. Alternatively, this disproportionate representation may be the result of Black women having less income and wealth, making them more likely to commit crime and be incarcerated. Their disadvantaged financial situation also meant that Black women could not afford legal counsel, possibly resulting in worse judicial outcomes⁶⁹⁴. On the other hand, white women’s illegal

⁶⁹⁰ Mississippi Biennial Report of the Board of Control. MS State Penitentiary. July 1, 1921- July 1, 1923, 28-30. Quoted in Bailey, ““Please Don’t Forget About Me””, 60.

⁶⁹¹ Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery*, 174–75.

⁶⁹² See Appendix D for a detailed table of the number of women admitted per year (table D.2).

⁶⁹³ The federal government was first to start the repression related to narcotics. The Federal Bureau of Narcotics was created in 1930 and the *Uniform State Narcotic Act* was passed in 1934. In 1937, the *Marijuana Tax Act* was adopted, creating a new class of criminals. Accounts such as Helen Bryan’s *Inside* in which she related her incarceration at the federal women’s prison suggest that the number of women convicted on narcotics charges was far more important in the federal system than in state prisons.

⁶⁹⁴ Carson, “Black and White Female Body Mass Index Values in the Developing Late 19th and Early 20th Century United States”, 315.

activities rarely brought them to the state penitentiary, and in Louisiana, as in other states, they were often confined in other institutions. Women's lesser crimes, such as petty larceny or prostitution, often resulted in fines or imprisonment at a parish jail⁶⁹⁵. While 60.6 percent of the Black women admitted to LSP were convicted of crimes against persons over the period 1901-1935 with little variation by decade, this proportion was of 38.7 percent for white women with great variations over time, although because of the limited size of the white female population, these numbers have to be read with caution: 57.1 percent in the decade 1901-1909, 66.7 percent in the 1910s, then it decreased to 24 percent in the 1920s and 27.8 percent in the period 1930-1935. The proportion of white women's crimes against property increasing during these last two decades to almost half of the white female admissions⁶⁹⁶.

These variations in numbers suggest changes in the women's immediate spatial environment. At times, the Black female building was overcrowded, although Camp D never reached the same critical level as the male camps where single beds were replaced by double-bunk beds, and then by triple-bunk beds, a situation that General Manager Himes commented lightly as "not as bad as it may read to you on paper". For Himes, "it [was] living within the income", a pragmatic position since the interwar period saw "a 60% increase in prison populations that resulted in dire overcrowding throughout much of the country"⁶⁹⁷.

According to official sources, the women's cell room was expanded to double its size in 1907-1908 to accommodate the numbers of women occupying Camp D, which had reached sixty Black women and ten whites. The rapid growth of the Black women's population had crowded their building⁶⁹⁸. In 1910-1911, some permanent improvements were made, requiring an investment of

⁶⁹⁵ Carson, "Black and White Female Body Mass Index Values in the Developing Late 19th and Early 20th Century United States", 312-13.

⁶⁹⁶ See Appendix F for a detailed table of the number of women admitted per race by decade and by alleged crime (table F.2).

⁶⁹⁷ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Report to His Excellency, The Honorable O.K. Allen Governor of Louisiana and to The Honorable Senators and Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana, May 1932, Call number 365.3 La, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Tepperman, "Strange Bedfellows", 21.

⁶⁹⁸ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1906-1907, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Numbers of women at Camp D are derived from Angola Women's Database.

\$6,000⁶⁹⁹. The occupation of the buildings was constantly oscillating with the prisoners' admissions and discharges. In the spring 1917, numbers were as low as thirty-four Black women and four whites, whereas in the summer 1918, there were sixty Black women and one single white. In the spring 1923, the Black women's numbers had decreased again under the bar of forty and there were three whites. Mid-December 1926, the level of sixty Black individuals was reached again, while there were five whites in the adjacent building. In the Black building, the level of seventy was reached in the spring 1928, eighty in the spring 1929, and ninety in the winter 1931, while the white building had only four, three and six residents respectively. Until 1935, numbers continued to oscillate between sixty-two and ninety-three Black women in one building, and two to fourteen white women in the other. In the early 1940s, numbers were up and Catholic Archbishop Rummel described the building occupied by Black women as a dormitory that seemed to be "terribly over-crowded" and a "fire trap"⁷⁰⁰.

Unfortunately not much is known on the equipment placed inside the buildings. The bedding was rudimentary: "Mattresses, made of corn shucks and Spanish moss, are in use at every Angola camp these days. Once a month or so they are taken out and aired in the sunshine". In at least one of the male camps, bedbugs - known to propagate quickly and to prevent sleep - were rampant⁷⁰¹. World War II brought its lot of material restrictions to penitentiaries across the country, and Angola was no exception. An investigation committee had found:

a notable lack of equipment with blankets being the only bed clothing of which there was a sufficiency. Many beds were found without sheeting, towels were conspicuous in their complete absence and tooth brushes and soap provided only for those inmates able to buy them⁷⁰².

During the war, all penal institutions had to obtain the AA-5 Rating of the Federal Rationing Board to be able to order equipment, and priority was given to military needs, which means that even with an adequate budget, these hygiene products could not have been purchased for Angola

⁶⁹⁹ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans.

⁷⁰⁰ 1944 Hearings, 240.

⁷⁰¹ William Sadler's Angola Diary "Lest we forget", Account of 1936 (June 21, 1936 entry), published in *The Angolite* Volume 1, no 14, June 27, 1953.

⁷⁰² "Floggings Noted at Angola Prison", *The Times-Picayune*, May 2, 1944.

prisoners⁷⁰³. The lack of proper equipment and the unsanitary condition of the building were features of Black women's spatial experiences at Angola. Those were not exceptional in Southern carceral spaces as historian Vivien Miller found out through her examination of prison writings between the World War I and the 1950s, that all underline the miserable physical conditions of confinement:

cramped, overcrowded and unsanitary bunkhouses and cells plagued with rats and cockroaches; filthy bedding and stinking clothing crawling with lice; constant noise and lack of sleep; scarce toiletries, writing paper and pencils thus inmates' reliance on outside financial and material assistance or the prison commissary's inflated prices⁷⁰⁴.

The 1944 investigation revealed that all Black camps were older and in need of replacement, including the women's camp⁷⁰⁵. The federal Bureau of Prisons "had condemned the women's camp as being deplorable and unfit for habitation"⁷⁰⁶. Camp D was not exceptional as the federal experts stated that at Angola:

All units now used for the housing of the inmates are inadequate for the purpose [...]. The buildings are unsafe, unsanitary and generally inadequate for the custody and treatment of prisoners. The water supply is inadequate, sanitary facilities practically useless and the fire hazard is grave⁷⁰⁷.

Overcrowding was an issue at Camp D according to the federal experts:

One hundred and ten women inmates of all ages live in barracks type dormitories, hardly adequate for the housing of less than one-half this number under unsanitary conditions and provided with only the barest essentials of food preparation, laundering and other facilities necessary for their sustenance, let alone reform⁷⁰⁸.

⁷⁰³ Paul E. Lacourrege and Son, to Rev. Archbishop Joseph Francis Rummel, 2 May 1944, Box 184.26, Folder 215.1, Legislation and Draft or Report, Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

⁷⁰⁴ Miller, "Reflections on the Chain Gang and Prison Narratives from the Southern United States", 256.

⁷⁰⁵ Report of the Advisory Committee to the Department of Institutions, 27 April 1944, Call number HV98.L8 L68, LLMVC. See page 16.

⁷⁰⁶ Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women, Part 3: 1950 to a Home of Their Own."

⁷⁰⁷ Sanford and Jenkinson, *State of Louisiana: Recommendations for Reorganization of the Penitentiary System, A Survey Report by the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons and Federal Prison Industries, Inc.*, 1–2.

⁷⁰⁸ Sanford and Jenkinson, *State of Louisiana: Recommendations for Reorganization of the Penitentiary System, A Survey Report by the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons and Federal Prison Industries, Inc.*, 18.

In 1947, the construction of new dorms for women was announced. A concrete block building with racially segregated facilities was to be erected about four miles east of Angola on the St. Francisville highway⁷⁰⁹. However, in 1951, another investigation committee found the women's quarters "completely antiquated and inadequate, but well scrubbed". Women were still living at Camp D in "wooden barracks with double-deck beds" and the "small enclave of clapboard buildings [was] surrounded by a short wire fence"⁷¹⁰. Recommendations were made "that prisoners be given three changes of clothing a week, including socks, underwear and two pairs of shoes" and "be required to take a shower" at the end of their work day, suggesting that the hygiene conditions were poor⁷¹¹. In 1953, the state of dilapidation of the buildings forming Camp D was so bad that heavy rain could cause roofs to leak, forcing the female prisoners to form "a bucket and tin-can brigade [...] in shops, dining rooms and living quarters"⁷¹². In 1955, *The Angolite* reported that the women's camp was "not a place to be proud of. Camp D today reflects years of makeshift, wear and tear, which has left every building in a dilapidated condition"⁷¹³.

The 1954 session of Legislature had finally voted a budget of \$275,000 to renovate an existing camp occupied by male prisoners at the northwest corner of the prison who would be moved to the new prison complex, and to transform that camp into a separate institution for women (which would be called 'the Willows'). LSP administration played musical chairs with its prisoners: Camp F was vacated around December 1955 when its former occupants moved to Camp A, only after Camp A occupants were moved to the new male compound. At the time, it was said that women would be able to take over in April 1956 but they finally moved to their new quarters in early November 1956⁷¹⁴. Before the construction started to transform Camp F building into the new Black women's camp, "the dormitory and kitchen [had] been padlocked, but the lobby [was] open and birds [were] fast recognizing it as a nesting place"⁷¹⁵. This building "was gutted and

⁷⁰⁹ "Work on State Women's Prison Dorm Set Soon", *State Times Advocate*, December 30, 1947.

⁷¹⁰ "Women at Pen 'Disturbing'", *State Times Advocate*, March 13, 1951; Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women, Part 3: 1950 to a Home of Their Own."

⁷¹¹ "Ask For End to Politics at State Pen", *State Times Advocate*, April 19, 1951.

⁷¹² *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 8, May 23, 1953.

⁷¹³ *The Angolite*, March 12, 1955.

⁷¹⁴ "Angola Women Prisoners Are in New Housing", *State Times Advocate*, November 3, 1956.

⁷¹⁵ *The Angolite*, December 3, 1955.

completely renovated”. Two other buildings had to be erected in the new camp: a two-story dormitory for white women and another two-story building that would “house office, lobby and visiting rooms”. Construction work started in the summer 1955 on the foundations⁷¹⁶. Despite the larger budget allocated to the new female camp, the existing gap between Black women’s and white women’s housing conditions at Camp D was not rectified. Indeed, instead of being assigned individual rooms, Black women housed in the renovated building were reduced to sharing an open space. In their dormitory-style housing, they were granted more personal space than what they had had at Camp D. They also had a recreation room, and a beauty parlor. In 1959, their living space was described as follows:

The sleeping quarters are in a long rectangular area. Approximately eighty beds, placed in four rows, extend the length of the room. Between the beds are ‘biffies’, or clothes lockers, each of which is shared by two inmates. There is one six-unit bath for these prisoners⁷¹⁷.

In contrast, white women were offered fifty individual rooms, each of them eight by eight feet, in a new building “that included an attached recreation room for table tennis, a television and furniture for lounging or reading”⁷¹⁸. Half of the rooms were on the first floor, the other half on the second, with a “sun parlor and tiled bathroom at each end”. Each room contained a bed, a ‘biffy’, and a nightstand. On each floor, at the end of the halls, there was a five-unit bathroom⁷¹⁹. Even if their doorless rooms could not offer a complete sense of privacy to white women, they had more privacy than their Black counterparts. Warden Sigler said in an interview that “women occupants will be given as much privacy as possible” and either him or the journalist omitted the fact that this privacy was only granted to white women, i.e. only a quarter of the female population at Angola at the time⁷²⁰. In carceral spaces, the confiscation of privacy is often described as a part of the punishment inflicted, so this double standard is not anecdotal but rather central to these women’s experiences of incarceration⁷²¹. Individual rooms or cells offer not only more privacy than dormitories but also a better sense of safety, another important variable in

⁷¹⁶ “Work Starts on Women’s Prison Camp”, *State Times Advocate*, August 23, 1955.

⁷¹⁷ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 58.

⁷¹⁸ Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, “Bad Girls, Convict Women, Part 3: 1950 to a Home of Their Own.”

⁷¹⁹ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 58.

⁷²⁰ “Angola Women Prisoners Are in New Housing”, *State Times Advocate*, November 3, 1956.

⁷²¹ Sykes, *The Society of Captives*, chap. 4.

prison settings. In an individual cell, someone can live and express emotions such as pain, fear or anger without disclosing them to others, which would mean showing their vulnerability and compromising their safety⁷²². In addition, this new setting also allowed white women to personalize their carceral spaces, and in doing so to inscribe “a visual imprint [...] on the landscape of the prison”⁷²³. For instance, they had sewn curtains for their windows⁷²⁴. This privilege was not in Black women’s reach since they had to share their living space with others. Unfortunately, no trace subsists to allow us to know how much Black women could exercise their autonomy by shaping their own spaces within the carceral spaces of their dormitory, a place some of them occupied and moved through for several years⁷²⁵.

Charlotte Mae Richardson, who had the opportunity to meet with the women confined at Angola only a few years after they had moved from Camp D to ‘the Willows,’ reported that one white woman she interviewed who had been at Camp D “stated that she likes the new prison better because there are no bars and the individual can decorate their own room”. Another one confided that the best rooms were in the front end of the building near the bathroom and away from the loud television, and that her “clique” had been able to control whom they wanted as “room neighbors”. On the contrary, Richardson found out that Black women did not enjoy their new spaces as much. One Black prisoner “claimed that she liked the old camp better because it was more private, the inmates were freer, and there were people and ‘mens’ around”⁷²⁶.

‘The Willows’ was “isolated from the other camps” and “in a yard area about the size of a city block”. Within the yard area stood “the five main rectangular cement block buildings consisting of the camp administration building, the kitchen and dining halls (with separate eating areas for the white and Black prisoners), [...] the tailor shop and laundry” and the two housing units described above. In addition to office spaces and a visiting room for women’s loved ones, the camp administration building housed the commissary store, the school, the infirmary, and

⁷²² Crewe et al., “The Emotional Geography of Prison Life”, 60, 71.

⁷²³ L.D. Baer, “Visual Imprints on the Prison Landscape: A Study of Decorations in Prison Cells”, 2005 quoted in Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 23.

⁷²⁴ “New Angola Women’s Unit Resembles School Dorm”, *The Morning Advocate*, April 21, 1957.

⁷²⁵ Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 28.

⁷²⁶ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 157, 84, 165.

isolation cells. The newest of the buildings housed the tailor shop and, “connected to the tailor shop by a doorway”, the laundry⁷²⁷. Recreational spaces were now available to women, with tennis, basketball and handball courts outside of the buildings as well as equipment placed in their day room. As had been the case for those bought for male prisoners, television sets and magazines were most likely purchased with the “prison welfare fund” amassed through the profits from prison commissaries⁷²⁸, which means that the prisoners paid out of their own pockets for recreational equipment⁷²⁹.

Beyond the “10-foot high fence with barbed wire topping” surrounding the new female compound were scattered thirty pecan trees. Before they were cultivated and commercialized thanks to the innovation of Antoine, enslaved on the Oak Alley Plantation in Louisiana, who hand-grafted trees two decades before the Civil War, wild pecans “sustained Indigenous Americans and African Americans for generations” and would have been familiar and comforting elements to these southern women⁷³⁰. However, the fence made these pecan trees inaccessible to the captives who could neither rest in their shade, nor collect their dropped nuts to enjoy their high nutritional value⁷³¹. Nature was surrounding them, but they were constantly reminded that they were confined within an environment that had been denatured, harnessed, and transformed.

Considered unworthy of officials’ attention, women were more often than not the objects of inferior arrangements that started in the parish jail and continued within the penitentiary. The spatial segregation of Angola’s Camp D consisted in inferior arrangements for Black women, whose quarters were often overcrowded, even as white quarters were often underused⁷³². This

⁷²⁷ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 58–59.

⁷²⁸ Commissary stores existed at every camp, and were operated by staff until warden Jones changed this in 1936. According to a former prisoner, the high-priced merchandise was generating profits of several dozens of thousands dollars annually. Source: Hell on Angola, *The New Orleans Item*, July 13, 1943.

⁷²⁹ “To Complete New Prison April 1, Sigler Reports”, by Margaret Dixon, *The Morning Advocate*, November 3, 1955.

⁷³⁰ Miles, *All That She Carried*, 196, 200, 215.

⁷³¹ “New Angola Women’s Unit Resembles School Dorm”, *The Morning Advocate*, April 21, 1957; Board of Institutions, Subcommittee on Penal Institutions, Records & Transcription, 10 October 1960, folder 34, Collection P1981-497, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. See page 59.

⁷³² “On the white side, the girls say, there are so few they rattle around in their dormitory like peas in a pod.” *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 10, June 1, 1953.

double standard was reproduced in their new quarters at ‘the Willows,’ although the women prisoners were moved further away from the male prisoners with the objective of keeping trouble at bay. In both female camps, whites and African Americans were granted different and separate spaces, and might not have had many opportunities to intermingle. In 1959, Richardson found out that most of women’s social relations were within their segregated section of the camp, but that some “cross-racial friendships” existed. These were born out of “constant interaction in similar work locations or through mutual interest in music and literature” or, in some cases, existed prior to incarceration, when women came from the same town. They met, talked and joked in “the yard, the classroom, the dayroom at the camp, the store and at work”, and it happened that white women who had a Coke vending machine in their quarters would buy some for their Black mates⁷³³. These interracial relationships might have been possible precisely because African Americans and whites were spatially segregated in two-tier housing. White women who benefitted from this double standard did not have to fear the physical proximity with their Black counterparts that so many whites resented⁷³⁴. Richardson’s interviews with white women highlighted the different spaces they used to meet each other and cultivate their relationships: their rooms, the dining room, the school, the yard, and the television room (or recreation room)⁷³⁵. We can only assume that their equivalents in the Black women’s quarters were also spaces that they would invest in and that would shape their experiences of incarceration and their relations with each other.

Unfortunately, sources do not offer a clear picture of how prison culture was shaped by the different locations within the carceral space. However, the diversity of settings within the penitentiary-plantation suggests there was a multitude of experiences and this research seeks to explore one of them in the following section: the women’s dining room.

⁷³³ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 167.

⁷³⁴ When Rosa Giallombardo interviewed women incarcerated at Anderson Federal penitentiary in the early 1960s, the prison had been desegregated. Here is what one white woman stated in her interview: “It was hard to use the rest room, the shower and to eat with them [Black prisoners]. In the beginning I wiped off the toilet seat, and in the shower I would let the water run a long time before I used it. I did this the first week, and then they began to talk to me and I realized they were as sensible as I am - that they’re like anyone else, and besides I was afraid they’d knock me in the head. You have to accept Negroes because you live with them twenty-four hours a day.” Giallombardo, *Society of Women*, 26–27.

⁷³⁵ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 83.

5.3 A look into the dining room

In 1912, Angola physician William G. Smith stated that he made daily visits to Camp D (which seems unlikely given the lack of medical staff to answer the needs of a carceral population of around 2,000 individuals). He pretended that “The sanitary conditions of this camp are always first class. The cooking is wholesome and the food plentiful”⁷³⁶. Smith’s assertion, whether true or not, suggests the importance of food in Angola’s organization. Indeed, food has always been crucial in prison: it conditions prisoners’ everyday life in captivity and in itself is symbolic of prison experience. Meals punctuate life in prison. Food intake, both in quantity and quality, is controlled by the prison administration. Incarcerated women are deprived of the ability to choose their food and to cook for themselves, which in turn affects their experience of embodiment and their control over their health and well-being⁷³⁷. The external control that prison imposed on individuals’ dietary habits is an important “part of the disciplinary machinery” and a constant reminder that they are stripped of their bodily autonomy and treated as children, i.e. told when and what to eat. It also has been asserted that the narratives of formerly enslaved individuals “contain more information about food than any other topic other than beatings and escapes”⁷³⁸. Indeed, “aware of the power of psychological incentive, slaveholders nudged the enslaved toward desired behaviors in exchange for greater quantities or selective kinds of foods and made a spectacle of bestowing food on special occasions”⁷³⁹.

⁷³⁶ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 132.

⁷³⁷ A recent study covering two dozen states reveals that due to prisons serving food not intended for humans or that was moldy, spoiled or had bugs in it, incarcerated people are over six times more likely than those in the community to contract a foodborne illness. Marlow et al., “Foodborne Disease Outbreaks in Correctional Institutions—United States, 1998–2014.”

⁷³⁸ Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 178.

⁷³⁹ Miles, *All That She Carried*, 211.

At Angola, sources attest that food deprivation was used as a tool of control, in combination with forced labor and other forms of physical violence, like it had been used during slavery. Some situations glimpsed in LSP official sources demonstrate that food was also a source of resistance and rebellion, as it is still the case today in carceral settings⁷⁴⁰. This section argues that the women's dining room at Angola was both a site of control and a site of resistance, where food was the object for contestation between LSP officials and incarcerated women.

Angola was intended to be a profitable business through the sales of its agricultural production (cotton, then sugar, and later cattle) as well as a self-sustaining institution that produced the food necessary to feed all its prisoners⁷⁴¹. However, despite official reports claiming that this was the case, other sources reveal that prisoners were underfed. For instance, in 1917, when Professor J.C. Heery, a prison reformer from Tasmania, visited Angola dining halls he noticed the “scanty meals” and the “insufficiently supplied tables” as well as the “inferior food” served to prisoners. He described the breakfast prisoners got before going to toil in the fields or elsewhere on the penitentiary-plantation:

a very small piece of meat, a little grits, bread and molasses, the men called it “Black Joe” and invited me to taste it. I did so, and it was bad. The coffee is not coffee as understood on the ‘outside’. As one prisoner remarked ‘They call it coffee; it’s hot, and helps to kill the taste of ‘Black Joe’.

This was deplorable according to Heery since he argued “that the successful working of a prison depends in a very large measure upon the proper supply and adjustment of the ‘eats’”⁷⁴². A few years later, in 1930, L.M. Fournet testified to a Senate Committee that when he took his position of superintendent of the Angola warehouse in 1923: “Prisoners were starving, almost falling down and they being whipped when they complained” and that the penitentiary employees were “stealing everything” including prisoners’ rations. Former warden R.M. Amacker “corroborate[d] the testimony offered by Mr. Fournet that prisoners at the Angola farm had been underfed. Mr.

⁷⁴⁰ For a discussion on food in 21st century women's prisons, see: Smith, “Punishment and Pleasure”; For a discussion on food deprivation as a tool of control in 21st century migrant detention centers, see: Carney, “Border Meals Detention Center Feeding Practices, Migrant Subjectivity, and Questions on Trauma.”

⁷⁴¹ LSP officials also hoped to have extra production to sell to other state institutions, which they did several times over the Jim Crow period, for instance by installing a cannery in 1934.

⁷⁴² “Prison System Declared Breeder Of Far Worse Evils”, *The Times-Picayune*, February 25, 1917; “Prison System Declared Breeder Of Far Worse Ills”, *The Times-Picayune*, February 26, 1917.

Amacker said that he and Mr. Fournet “partially” remedied this condition”⁷⁴³. In the 1930s, food was still a concern for prisoners. On June 24, 1936, white male prisoner William Sadler wrote in his diary: “It seems to be continual warfare here to get enough to eat. Any food is legitimate prey regardless of who owns it. The ration of salt meat for 350 men is three and a half pounds per day. Not A fat man in camp.” Three days later, Sadler complained not about the quantity but about the quality of the food served at Camp E where he was detained: “I can’t eat this stinking stew of rotten vegetables they give us for dinner and supper. It would knock a buzzard off a gut-wagon it smells so foul”. The only solution available to him and his co-detainees was to buy food at the prison commissary: “I borrowed 20 cents off Ray Carrol, the office man, today and bought a loaf of ‘store’ bread and bologna”. The bread, baked in the prison bakery, and bologna that Sadler got at the commissary constituted a luxury for most prisoners and a considerable improvement in comparison with what was served to them in the dining hall. The contrast was so important that it led Sadler to state what seems an exaggeration born out of daily deprivation: “Nothing I have ever eaten before outside tasted so good”⁷⁴⁴. Occasionally, the quality of the food even caused food poisoning⁷⁴⁵.

Coerced to work for long hours at physically demanding tasks, prisoners had expectations of sufficient food intakes able to sustain their body’s energy needs. Historian Marjoleine Kars, who studied a slave rebellion in the Dutch colony of Berbice, reminded us that enslaved individuals had the same type of expectations:

In lives of incessant violence and acute exploitation, enslaved people, like oppressed workers everywhere, nevertheless expected a modicum of fairness and predictability. They labored with an expectation of sufficient food to do the work, time off, some autonomy, reasonable rules with clear consequences, and a chance at building families and communities. [...] Such expectations about conditions do not mean that people accepted their enslavement. Nor do they mean that the enslaved people did not resist their exploitation in daily life. Rather, ruled by terror, and wary of armed rebellion,

⁷⁴³ “Fournet Traces Vanished Prison Mules for Senate Probers”, *The Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1930. In contrast with this informed statement, a journalist who had visited Angola at the same period declared that there was “an abundance of substantial food”. Source: “No Cells and Little Indoor Work in Louisiana’s Model Prison”, *Boston Daily Globe*, June 3, 1923.

⁷⁴⁴ William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget” account of 1936, published in *the Angolite*, Volume 1, no 14. June 27, 1953.

⁷⁴⁵ Thirty Black men were food poisoned at Camp C in July 1953. Source: *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 16, July 11, 1953.

most begrudgingly accommodated themselves to their enslavement as long as certain minimum standards were observed, in order to survive⁷⁴⁶.

Long before special food was introduced at Angola for holidays as a favor to prisoners in the 1940s, there were instances when the penitentiary officials resorted to alter prisoners' menus as a punishment⁷⁴⁷. At least on one occasion, a woman was "fed on bread and water" to discipline her after she had threatened verbally and physically another prisoner. In this April 1909 incident, both women were white⁷⁴⁸.

Later incidents appearing in Black women's disciplinary records reveal their discontent with the food. On November 11, 1958, Gertrude J. was punished for "wasting food" by the loss of thirty days of good time⁷⁴⁹. On February 25, 1959, Mary T. B. was placed on isolation for an indefinite period, in addition to losing thirty days of good time, also for "wasting food"⁷⁵⁰. A few months later, on May 29, 1959, Evelyn J. lost thirty days of good time for "dumping food in the garbage can"⁷⁵¹. Although the records do not provide specific details about these incidents, it is likely that the women had refused to eat the food because it was of poor quality or not well prepared. An alternative plausible interpretation is that their refusal to eat was a political action determined to gain an improvement of their incarceration conditions, food or otherwise. Indeed, "complaints and protests about prison food are often used to highlight poor conditions in prison more generally"⁷⁵². This observation made in 21st century's women's prisons can highlight some of the issues at stake in protests over food that were observed at Angola:

Mealtimes in prison can be tense occasions where emotions such as resentment, anger and frustration often find expression. Prisoners may express their feelings by leaving the table, shouting, banging trays, spitting food out or throwing it at staff. Such

⁷⁴⁶ Kars, *Blood on the River*, 80–81.

⁷⁴⁷ "Prisoners at Angola Feast on Turkey at Real Thanksgiving", *The Morning Advocate*, November 29, 1940.

⁷⁴⁸ Entry #3073, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entry #4179, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection.

⁷⁴⁹ Conduct report, 2 February 1959, Box 8, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁵⁰ Conduct report, 17 May 1960, Box 15, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁵¹ Conduct report, 17 November 1960, Box 16, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁵² Smith, "Punishment and Pleasure", 206.

outbursts are not just about the food itself (which to the outside observer on the whole seemed to be quite good), but rather are about power and powerlessness. In this context, food acts as a prop to establish women's refusal to bow under authority. It becomes one means of countering attempts to dictate how women should conduct their bodily activities. Complaining about food provides a way of kicking-off at the system and for those with few ways in which to rebel, food provides one means of doing so⁷⁵³.

Incidents during which food became contentious also happened in the men's dining rooms where men's resistance was met with brutality. For example, Sadler wrote in his diary on July 19, 1936:

Word from Camp G today says the big stripes there 'bucked' at breakfast this morning because the gravy had too much burned flour in it. About 300 refused to come out of the dining room when the bell rang for work. "Brutal Bill", the captain, ringed the mess hall with shotgun-armed convict guards and, with his four foremen drove the strikers out to the field, they say. The witness tells how "Madam Clapp" had his head split, the blood dripping down into his grits. The witness says "Brutal Bill" made him eat grits, blood and all, before he would let him get up from table⁷⁵⁴.

Prisoners' resentment over poor food and disapproval of the conditions of their incarceration appear in most penitentiaries and prisons. In a letter addressed to the Texas governor in 1907, a Black woman, former prisoner at the Johnson penal farm stated that "some times we get enough something to eat and some time we dont and what we do her it isnt fit to eat for the bread is two or three days old" whereas the official report had advanced that "it is a source of pleasure to see the wonderful improvement in their [prisoners'] conditions in a very short period, due, no doubt, to plenty of good, wholesome exercise, plenty of well-cooked provisions". According to the same report, the women in Texas state penitentiary system were "exceptionally well fed and cared for"⁷⁵⁵. In 1924, penologist Frank Tannenbaum had documented prisoners' conditions in the American South and found out that: "Men go to sleep so hungry that they wake up trying to feed themselves in their sleep." A female prisoner confided to him: "I suffer from actual hunger all the time", that the food itself was unsanitary, the variety poor, and often "infested with weevils and worms"⁷⁵⁶.

⁷⁵³ Smith, "Punishment and Pleasure", 205.

⁷⁵⁴ William Sadler's Angola Diary "Lest we forget" account of 1936 published in *the Angolite*, Volume 1, no 18, July 25, 1953.

⁷⁵⁵ Quoted by Gregory, "Persistence and Irony in the Incarceration of Women in the Texas Penitentiary, 1907-1910", 47.

⁷⁵⁶ Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases of the South*, 92-93.

According to historian Vivien Miller, southern prisoners often complained about “the monotonous and limited prison diet that was heavy in beans and pork products but lacking in vitamin-rich fish, fruit and vegetables and frequently included rancid and stale food”⁷⁵⁷. Angola prisoners sometimes resorted to smuggling food from the kitchen, chasing rabbits or other small animals to cook them to provide alternatives to what they were served on their plates. Such was the case of Bella Mae W. who was punished by the loss of thirty days of good time for “possession of food” on August 24, 1959⁷⁵⁸, or of Mildred S.P. whose “drawing privileges” were forfeited for two months for “using stove to make toast while feeding line” on May 7, 1961⁷⁵⁹.

During her research covering the period 1930-1954, historian Mara L. Dodge found similar examples of discipline around food at the Illinois State Reformatory for women. For instance, one woman was placed for two days in solitary confinement for “sneaking a piece of cake out of the dining room”⁷⁶⁰. Dodge concluded that small actions were reinterpreted as infringements to prison rules because of the restrictiveness of the carceral settings:

Such high levels of surveillance generated bitter resentment and increased resistance. Indeed, if female prisoners did not suffer under such onerous levels of scrutiny, many of their behaviors—sneaking cookies, exchanging desert pies, failing to drink a cup of coffee, not eating all their French toast—would have passed undetected. Such actions, which would not normally signify defiance, became acts of resistance solely as a result of the rigid disciplinary regime to which the women were subjected”⁷⁶¹.

Of course, men’s prisons were also the stage for protests around food. Crime historian Alex Tepperman found several occurrences of riots during the Interwar period, which started in prisons dining halls. In August 1929, nine hundred men confined at the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth “lashed out over insufficient food and abuse from the guards” and “broke into open

⁷⁵⁷ Miller, “Reflections on the Chain Gang and Prison Narratives from the Southern United States”, 256.

⁷⁵⁸ Conduct report, 30 December 1959, Box 15, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁵⁹ Conduct report, 9 July 1962, Box 21, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁶⁰ Dodge, *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind*, 204.

⁷⁶¹ Dodge, *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind*, 226.

revolt”⁷⁶². In December of the same year, an outbreak started when men “entered the mess hall” for lunch. Here is Tepperman’s account of the escalation of events that would ensue:

The *Washington Post* reported that one prisoner took a look at the menu and complained “Here is that d—n Spanish rice again,” before seizing a platter of rice and throwing it at an attendant. This set off the commotion, as hundreds of convicts took dishes of food and cutlery and hurled them at guards before stampeding into the prison yard. As the *Chicago Daily Tribune* poetically waxed, once outside, “they milled around, cursing each other, cursing their keepers, cursing everybody, and like Indiana at the dog dance, working themselves up into a pitch of emotional insanity.” Either by design or simply due to the spirit of the moment carrying them away, the convicts also took the warden and several guards hostage⁷⁶³.

The 1929 Auburn riot was crushed violently and prisoners’ claims dismissed. Luckily, not all penitentiary officials replied with the same attitude towards prisoners’ protests about food. In 1928, recurring protests prompted Texas Prison Board to hire a graduate of the Home Economics Department at the State University to oversee the food system for Huntsville and the penal farms. Thanks to her work, the “food bucks”, i.e. prisoners’ refusal to work in protest over the food, stopped⁷⁶⁴.

Angola prisoners’ strategies around food also included hunger strikes, although no archival trace of such a strike has been found in the women’s camp. As for other protest strategies, because of public opinion, hunger strikes had more chance of being successful if covered in the press. Men organized several hunger strikes at Angola in the 1950s. In 1952, 120 white men went on strike with demands concerning work hours and hygiene. Their protest was broken by tear gas thrown in the mess hall where they had barricaded themselves⁷⁶⁵. Penitentiary officials wanted first and foremost not to be blamed for the death of some of their prisoners, a concern that appeared in this 1957 correspondence between the LSP warden and his superior:

[..] may I suggest that no further reference be made to the fact that you ‘will not permit these prisoners to starve’. This might give ‘aid and comfort’ to these prisoners and cause them to continue longer than necessary. If statements need to be made, I would

⁷⁶² Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows”, 203.

⁷⁶³ Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows”, 205.

⁷⁶⁴ Jach, “It’s Hell in a Texas Pen”, 381.

⁷⁶⁵ “Supt. Bazer Ends Prisoners’ Strike With Gas Attack; Radio Man Ejected”, *State Times Advocate*, May 11, 1952.

suggest that you say that ‘these men, if they starve, will starve in the presence of food which will be regularly be served to them’⁷⁶⁶.

Hunger strikes were used elsewhere to protest against incarceration conditions and the denial of prisoners’ rights. Tepperman’s account of the hunger strike held by male federal prisoners at Alcatraz in 1940 makes it clear that this was a powerful strategy:

In an exchange with James V. Bennett, the federal Director of Prisons, Warden Johnston expressed palpable irritation with the rebellion, seeing the inmates’ subtle non-violence as a concerted attempt to damage the institution’s reputation and proper functioning. Johnston explained with some exasperation that, ‘so far as I can judge at this moment, the men seem to be making their annual bid for attention and perhaps came to the conclusion that striking was not the way to do it but going without food, a la Mahatma Gandhi, would be a better sort of protest.’ The *San Francisco Examiner* had heard about the strike, Johnson noted, and ‘played the story over the front page,’ giving it ‘as prominent a space as they did President Roosevelt and the Democratic Convention and more attention than they did to Hitler, Mussolini and the World War.’ While the Alcatraz strikes were, in their non-violence, unlike those at Leavenworth, Auburn, and elsewhere, the notion of a semi-united, motivated prison population chilled administrators throughout the country⁷⁶⁷.

Hunger strikes are among the most extreme forms of protest, with strikers putting their own lives in jeopardy. They constitute powerful statements against the slow death brought by incarceration where life seems suspended, and a strong affirmation of freedom and agency within an institution determined to strip all human beings from making personal choices. This is reflected in the way in which French political prisoner Jean-Marc Rouillan commented on his cell mate Ricou’s decision to enter an unlimited hunger strike after a fifth denial of parole: “His struggle will be death by hunger instead of the end by a slow death. Death for death. Suffering for suffering. An unspeakable counter-fire, a human torch, a sparkle of life in the total night of prisons”⁷⁶⁸. Hunger strikes transform a daily banal activity, eating, into the political action of non-eating destined to reverse power relations. As in every negotiation, bluff could be a tool used during these strikes, which does not take away the importance of the demands carried by strikers. This was the case

⁷⁶⁶ Edward D. Grant, Director of Institutions, to Maurice H. Sigler, Warden, 9 January 1957, folder 1957, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Ed Grant Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁶⁷ Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows”, 210.

⁷⁶⁸ [our translation from] “Sa lutte, ce sera la mort par la faim contre la fin par la mort lente. Mort pour mort. Souffrance pour souffrance. Un contre-feu indicible, une torche humaine, une lueur de vie dans la nuit totalitaire des prisons” Rouillan, *Je hais les matins*, 133.

for Judith Ward, a former British prisoner: “It wasn’t a hunger strike in the sense that we were prepared to starve to death (although we didn’t let the authorities know this), it was an attempt to better general conditions”⁷⁶⁹.

Women at Angola may never have resorted to this extreme strategy to express their agency; however, their protests against the material conditions of their incarceration used food and complaints about food to get their messages through. In the late 1950s, the quality of the food served to the women seemed to have improved along other material conditions. A white woman lauded a Black cook for her performance in the kitchen: “The biggest wail coming from here is, ‘I’m getting too fat!’ And the blame’s being laid on Savannah ‘Shortie’ R. She cooks tooooo great”⁷⁷⁰! Nevertheless, Savannah R. was “reprimanded and warned” only a few days after this comment had appeared in *The Angolite*’s women’s column “Behind the lace curtain”. On January 31, 1956, she was re-assigned to the sewing room and left her position in the kitchen because she was “not giving out food in like proportions”. LSP officials also reproached her for “using vile and profane language” and “for being a constant and general trouble maker”⁷⁷¹. The decision to re-assign her to another form of labor reveals the desire from the LSP administration to limit the influence that a cook could have on fellow prisoners. Indeed, as a cook, she had a crucial role in the camp, which in turn was a reflection of the centrality of food in prisoners’ life and of the importance of the dining room in the dynamics of the female camp.

A few months after this incident, women were moved to their new quarters where the joint kitchen and dining room were placed in the building housing Black women. The dining room was furnished with individual tables seating four, probably a way to limit incidents as well as to provide an appearance of a household setting. Meals were prepared in the women’s kitchen for white and Black women, while all male prisoners were fed in the central dining room located in the new prison with food prepared in the central kitchen⁷⁷². The new dining room then became the subject for scrutiny for LSP officials desiring to enforce racial segregation in the midst of

⁷⁶⁹ Judith Ward, *Ambushed*, 1993, quoted in Smith, “Punishment and Pleasure”, 206.

⁷⁷⁰ *The Angolite*, January 28, 1956.

⁷⁷¹ Conduct report, 30 March 1959, Box 9, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁷² “New Angola Women’s Unit Resembles School Dorm”, *The Morning Advocate*, April 21, 1957.

civil rights protests and victories across the country for integration. Only a few months before the opening of ‘the Willows’, the warden received a letter recommending adjustments to provide “separate facilities for white and colored”, including a fence and a gate between the two sections of the camp, and the “partition” of the dining hall area. To limit interactions between the two groups, it was suggested “to have an electric serving tray where the food for the white women could be dispensed in the dining area set aside for them”⁷⁷³. Warden Sigler opposed this by simply stating: “My personal opinion is that this is unnecessary”⁷⁷⁴. Despite the warden’s opposition to this ridiculous attempt to defend segregation while the whole racial scaffolding of Jim Crow was slowly collapsing, the concern came back a few months later. In January 1957, LSP was granted \$8,000 to provide a segregation barrier in the dining hall (comparatively, a \$3,000 fund was granted to provide a temporary execution chamber)⁷⁷⁵. Some white women certainly welcomed this arrangement, which spared them from undesired interracial contacts. In 1959, one of Richardson’s interviewees, a white woman working as a dining room orderly, said she did not like her fellow inmate workers because they were Black⁷⁷⁶. The barrier separating white and Black women while they were eating their meals was not enough to ensure a complete separation of the races at all times and the only white woman who worked in that space resented the fact that she had to work alongside Black women while her companions did not. Black women might also have preferred a segregated dining room where they did not have to comply with Jim Crow etiquette. The dining room was a space contested along racial lines. This was not unique to Angola women’s camp, and in other prisons, some of the prisoners’ protests occurring in dining halls even targeted racial discrimination and segregation. For instance in 1945, Black and white and even Japanese American men had refused to eat in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, Ashland, Kentucky, and Milan, Michigan to protest Jim Crow in the mess halls of the federal penitentiaries they were confined to⁷⁷⁷.

⁷⁷³ H.J. Hoorman, Chairman, R.F. Odom, Committeeman, W.H. Moore, Committeeman to warden Maurice H. Sigler, 23 August 1956, folder 1956, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Ed Grant Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁷⁴ Warden Sigler to Senator Reinach, 24 August 1956, folder 1956, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Ed Grant Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁷⁵ Minutes, 17 January 1957, Collection P1983-580, Board meeting minutes, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁷⁷⁶ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 131.

⁷⁷⁷ “30 Strike At Federal Prison”, *Chicago Defender*, August 18, 1945.

For a long time at Angola, whereas prison officials claimed that the food was wholesome, prisoners often complained of the insufficient rations as well as the poor quality of the food. At times, LSP employees even hogged the best quality food depriving prisoners of basic needs. The institution's disregard for its prisoners was apparent not only in the food they were fed but also in the way they were fed. For instance, until 1953, prisoners had to carry their spoons in their pockets all day if they were expecting to eat, which was obviously a very "unsanitary practice". The women were spared this dehumanizing requirement, which the commentator attributed to the lack of pockets of their uniforms: "SPOONS NOW GONE FROM ALL POCKETS. [...] The Women's Unit, of course, never did carry spoons. Because, where would they carry 'em'"⁷⁷⁸? Maybe the institution had more consideration for women, or maybe it was simply because it was easier for the institution to provide utensils and wash them for the limited number of women than it was for the thousands of men confined at Angola.

The repetition of the same menu was also a feature especially resented by prisoners who welcomed holiday menus when they started to appear in the institution⁷⁷⁹. Food was a crucial element of the experience of incarceration, and prisoners' complaints about food occurred in the dining room where meals were served, occasionally transforming the dining room into a political space where demands for better conditions of incarceration were expressed. Because racial hierarchies were being challenged in the 'outside' world as well in the confines of the penitentiary-plantation, the dining room was also a political space where color lines could be erected or could be crossed. Finally, the dining room was also a space where conflicts could erupt and where discipline could be deployed as suggested by the two following examples. On June 13, 1911, Millie D. was whipped by Captain Harvey for "attempting to stab [a] woman with [a] fork" presumably during a meal, and on August 29, 1915, Nancy G. received a black mark for "misbehavior at [the] dinner table"⁷⁸⁰.

⁷⁷⁸ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 16, July 11, 1953.

⁷⁷⁹ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 37, November 28, 1953.

⁷⁸⁰ Entries #3927, #6115, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection.

Challenging authority was not an easy task for the women confined in the ‘Forbidden City’ where they had limited control over their own movements and their behaviors were constantly watched. The next section proposes to explore women’s escapes and escape attempts in order to document those moments when, despite this spatial control, women tried and sometimes succeeded to define their spatial experiences on their own terms.

5.4 “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence”: Escaping the ‘Forbidden City’

Newspapers are replete with Angola’s male prisoners’ escape attempts and recaptures, but incidences of female escapes and escape attempts are harder to find. For this section, the data is mostly drawn from penitentiary records. Some numbers published in the institution reports suggest that escapes occurred frequently at Angola, but their numbers vary a lot over time. According to former employee Joseph Mouledous, “during the first thirty years of operation, Angola lost approximately three per cent of its population yearly through escapes”⁷⁸¹. For instance, in 1916, 94 individuals escaped for an average population of 1,930 individuals, representing 4.9 percent but 53 of these individuals were recaptured or voluntarily surrendered. Two of them were shot and killed while attempting to escape, and another one was shot and killed, mistaken for escape⁷⁸². In the 1930s, the numbers of escapes seem to have decreased, with a total of 184 escapees over the period 1931-1935, then only four in 1936 (including an escapee who committed suicide while resisting his recapture), and no escapes in the years 1937 to 1940⁷⁸³. The 1930s saw at least one spectacular breakout when “some of the hardened outlaws of the ‘red hat’ gang and of the gunman class carried out mass escapes killing free personnel and

⁷⁸¹ Mouledous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System”, 79.

⁷⁸² Report made by Hy. L. Fuqua, General Manager of the State Penitentiary to the Governor and General Assembly of Louisiana for the Regular Session of 1918 Covering the Biennial Period of 1916 and 1917, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Information on escapes page 29-30, 40.

⁷⁸³ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC.

inmate guards in the act”⁷⁸⁴. In September 1933, a white male recidivist, Charles Frazier, led a mass escape at Camp E, during which the widely abhorred Captain Singleton was killed. After World War II, on average, less than three dozen individuals attempted an escape annually⁷⁸⁵. In 1953, when a lot of changes were implemented and prisoners feared the consequences of a new prison regime, numbers went up to 102 escapes, but declined again in subsequent years⁷⁸⁶.

This research uncovered only a few dozen female escapes occurred at Camp D, and later at ‘the Willows’. Details are provided for some of them below. A pattern seems to emerge from the examination of the records: half of the escape attempts occurred during summer months, and involved two women attempting to flee together, with at least one of them having been at Angola only for a short period of time before the event. Like for men, most of their escape attempts were unsuccessful, with the women being recaptured the same day and punished for trying to recover their freedom. Despite the unfortunate results of their attempts, these events demonstrate the women’s agency and their desire for freedom.

In January 1901, as soon as Angola was taken over by the state of Louisiana, Martha B. came back voluntarily. She had been a state prisoner at Angola under the convict leasing regime, and had escaped the plantation in 1898. The woman might have read or heard about the state’s declared intention to treat prisoners more humanely than had been the case when the James family was in charge. She might then have decided that it was safer for her to surrender and complete her two-year sentence under the direct control of the state⁷⁸⁷.

The first escape attempt by a woman recorded in LSP official sources was on June 4, 1911, i.e. ten years after the opening of Camp D at Angola, and involved two Black women: Annie B. who had received a life sentence in 1906 in Bossier parish, and Katie W. who had received a two-year sentence in Monroe. Prior to her escape, Annie B. had been punished twice by two successive Camp D captains: the first time in December 1909, Captain D.P. Gayle hit her with “twenty

⁷⁸⁴ Mouldous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System”, 80.

⁷⁸⁵ Department of Institutions, Biennial Report 1945-1947, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC.

⁷⁸⁶ Allgood, “A Sociological Analysis of the Transition of the Louisiana Penal System”, 110.

⁷⁸⁷ Entry #15, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907, LSP Collection.

lashes” for “dangerous threats and disobedience to Captain” when she participated in a collective protest (see introduction), and the second time, she was “whipped” by Captain Harvey for insulting Mrs. Harvey, his wife and Camp D’s matron. Katie W. had arrived at Angola in late February 1911, i.e. a little bit more than three months before the escape. The admission records do not mention a recapture date for them, although newspapers reported on Katie W.’s recapture in Monroe in November 1911 after she had been out for five months and had been to “Pensacola, Birmingham, Mobile and New Orleans”⁷⁸⁸.

In the meantime, probably encouraged by Annie B. and Katie W.’s success, less than a month later, on July 1, 1911, another duo took a chance. This time, it was Jenny Ann B., who had received a life sentence in Tensas parish of which she had already served almost five years, and Beulah R. from New Orleans, who had arrived in October 1909 with a three-year sentence. The escape attempt was not the women’s first infringement of the rules. Jenny Ann B. had received a whipping from Captain Harvey three months before the escape attempt, for fighting with Mary T. Beulah R. had been whipped one year before the escape attempt for “hitting a woman on [her] head with [a] piece of iron”. Both were recaptured the day of their failed attempt and “whipped” by Captain Harvey. Jenny Ann B. did not attempt to escape again. However, three weeks later, Beulah R. tried to run away on her own and succeeded⁷⁸⁹. Interestingly, Beulah R. had had previous experiences of successful escapes at the Orleans Parish Prison (OPP). Arrested several times since 1905 for minor property offenses, Beulah R. had served time at OPP before becoming a state prisoner. Arrested in October 1906 for several larcenies, she failed to appear in court. She was then arrested in March 1907 and a few days later, gave birth to a male baby in the parish jail⁷⁹⁰. They were both removed to the Charity Hospital, “Beulah escaped with her child [from Charity Hospital] as soon as she had recovered her strength”⁷⁹¹. Later recaptured, she escaped another time from OPP in September 1907. Her picture was then published in the newspaper. It was meant to serve as a warning to any white household that might potentially employ her as a domestic laborer, then subsequently be robbed by her. “The same day that Beulah escaped, her

⁷⁸⁸ Entry #3219, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entry #6289, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection; *The Monroe News-Star*, November 2, 1911.

⁷⁸⁹ Entries #3395, #5279, #6200, Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923, LSP Collection.

⁷⁹⁰ “Baby Born in Jail”, *The Times-Picayune*, March 16, 1907.

⁷⁹¹ “Four Babies in Jail”, *The Times-Picayune*, August 13, 1909.

infant boy, about 4 or 5 months old, who was with his mother, was taken down to the prison and held as a hostage for Beulah's return". The woman did not return to the jail, leading the journalist to conclude that she "did not care enough for her child to give herself up"⁷⁹². What happened to Beulah and her child afterwards is unknown, but in 1909, she found herself again in the hands of the criminal justice system. She gave birth to another baby at the parish prison while she was serving a six-month sentence for larceny. This time, she stayed for the remainder of her sentence while her baby "was taken out by relatives of the woman"⁷⁹³. The next time she was arrested and charged, the judge sent her to the state penitentiary where he probably thought she had less chance of escaping. She proved him wrong. However, despite her second escape attempt from Angola in July 1911 being successful, eight months later in March 1912, Beulah R. returned voluntarily to the penitentiary. According to the *Times-Democrat* where she was described as a "quadroon" and "one of the most notorious female criminals ever sent up from New Orleans", she had been in Houston, Texas, after her escape and came back to the penitentiary with "a wardrobe that resembled that of an opera star and [...] jewelry of no inconsiderable value," suggesting to the reader that she most probably committed some other crimes during her stay in Texas⁷⁹⁴. Back at LSP, she was fined two months of good time. However, probably due to a clerical mistake, her sentence was not extended like it should have been to a later date to "compensate" for the eight-month period she had been on the run. She was discharged in June 1912 and disappeared from the public eye.

Florentine J. and Eliza P. each attempted an escape in the spring 1913, at a two-week interval. Florentine J., a burglar from New Orleans with several prior sentences served in the parish jail, had been admitted to LSP with a three-year sentence due to expire in October 1913. With the good time she had accumulated, her discharge was scheduled on March 19, 1913, but on February 15, 1913, the penitentiary board met and decided to fine her two months of her good time, pushing back her release by two months. This might explain why, on March 27, she decided to try to escape. Unsuccessful, she received eighteen "licks" administered by Captain Austin with his whip, and was finally discharged on May 19 the same year. Eliza P. had a very different story.

⁷⁹² "Beulah R. Caught", *The Times-Picayune*, October 11, 1907.

⁷⁹³ "Four Babies in Jail", *The Times-Picayune*, August 13, 1909.

⁷⁹⁴ "Louisiana Affairs", *The Times-Democrat*, March 30, 1912.

Admitted with a life sentence in May 1912 at 50 years old, she was much older than the average of her companions at Angola. Convicted in Ouachita parish of “murder without capital punishment” for the killing of her husband, she was almost a year into her sentence when attempting to escape from Camp D⁷⁹⁵. Her unsuccessful attempt was not an obstacle to her securing a pardon the following year, when the board of pardon acknowledged the circumstances of her crime and conviction. Her attorney had showed up drunk on the day of her trial, and she decided to plead guilty when she found herself without a lawyer in front of a big crowd in court. After her conviction, “certain persons” informed the judge that the woman had been the victim of an abusive and brutal husband, which prompted him to support her pardon and convince the board to correct “a direct miscarriage of justice”. She received a full pardon in October 1913⁷⁹⁶.

In the following years, only a few women attempted to escape, and all of them did so alone. All of them except one were unsuccessful. The first one was Clementine B. on July 31, 1913. She had been a state prisoner with a life sentence since her conviction in late October 1912, only nine months prior. Then, on March 6, 1914, Nancy G. was “strapped” by Captain Austin for “leaving camp”. Nancy G. being at LSP since 1907, it is unlikely that she would have waited that long to try an escape. This was probably not a real escape attempt, although there is a mention of “escaped and recaptured” in her admission record. Nevertheless, this incident informs us of the control of movements that women were subjected to at Camp D. The following year, on May 3, 1915, Laura H. escaped and was recaptured the same day. She had entered LSP in 1912 at 16 for a twenty-year sentence after being convicted of attempting murder by poisoning. She had allegedly placed cut glass in cookies she had baked for Dr. H.B. Womble (physician and member of the school board) and his family whose cook she was assisting in Gilbert, Louisiana⁷⁹⁷. In January 1916, Lethie R. escaped. Admitted in June 1915, she had already served half of her one-year sentence when she escaped the Baton Rouge receiving station where she was confined. She would be recaptured only at the end of June 1916. Less than a week later after being brought back to the ‘Walls’, she tried to escape again, but this time was recaptured the same day. Lethie R. was

⁷⁹⁵ *The Times*, December 13, 1911.

⁷⁹⁶ Entries #6036, #7072, Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923, LSP Collection; “Three Convicts Are Recommended For Full Pardon”, *The Times-Democrat*, October 2, 1913.

⁷⁹⁷ “Gilbert. Cook Who Put Glass in Doctor’s Meats Gets Twenty Years”, *The Times-Democrat*, June 25, 1912.

discharged in November 1916; she had lost two months of good time. On October 27, 1918, Leah J. ran away. Her file does not mention a date of recapture or discharge, suggesting that she was never brought back to the penitentiary. She had arrived at LSP at 22, six months prior to her escape, in company of a group of prisoners from Orleans parish. Although two of them were Black men with the same conviction as Leah J.'s: "breaking and entering in the night time", none of them were her accomplices⁷⁹⁸. While Leah J. had received a three-to-five year sentence, Joseph W. aged 25 had received a one-to-one-year-and-a-half sentence. They were both convicted on the same day, and might even have met in the Orleans court house. Joseph W. attempted to escape on May 6, 1918, was recaptured, only to die from "tuberculosis" on May 31. Maybe Leah J. heard by the prison grapevine about her unfortunate companion's death, and that contributed to her motivation to escape⁷⁹⁹.

No escape attempt was afterwards recorded at Camp D for almost three years, until a duo of washerwomen ran away on July 4, 1921. Dora F from Shreveport and Mary P. from East Carroll parish had both arrived in May 1921, within a two-week period. Did they take advantage of celebrations of the national holiday to sneak out? The press reported a "program of music and speaking [...] for the benefit of the prisoners" organized at the Baton Rouge receiving station where prisoners received "a good dinner", ice lemonade provided by the penitentiary management, in addition to ice cream donated by "friends of the prisoners"⁸⁰⁰. At Angola, men and women were probably on holiday as well and the suspension of the regular labor schedule and additional comings and goings generated by the holiday might have created an opportunity that the two women seized. There is no trace in the records of their recapture. No other escape attempt was recorded at Camp D for the rest of the decade, except for Rosa H.'s. Admitted early February 1926 with an indeterminate sentence of six years to seven years and eight months, her first attempt to escape Angola was on July 5, 1926. Recaptured the day after, she ran away again on September 11 of the same year, and this time was more successful. Nevertheless, she came

⁷⁹⁸ "Woman Confesses; Police Recover Stolen Property", *The Times-Picayune*, December 24, 1917.

⁷⁹⁹ Entries #3927, #7148, #7308, #9367, #11461, #11463, Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923, LSP Collection.

⁸⁰⁰ "Entertainments", *State Times Advocate*, July 5, 1921.

back on November 9 with a new conviction (#16696) in addition of the time she “owed” on her previous sentence⁸⁰¹.

In 1930, two white women attempted to run away and failed. Nevertheless, unlike all other women’s escapes and attempts, the event was reported in the press. Of particular concern was the punishment they had received from Camp D captain, Jesse M. Willis in retaliation for their failed attempt. J. Bob Daniels, farm manager and occupant of the ‘Big House’, explained the circumstances of the escape:

These two women [...] ate their dinner hurriedly one night several weeks ago, slipped out of the dining hall and got away. I was notified of the escape and soon afterward the two women were overtaken on the river bank about a mile from the women’s camp. A white guard and a negro guard were together when they made the capture.

After the recapture, “Captain Willis gave the women a light spanking”. Asked by a member of a Senate investigating committee “Were these lashes administered on the bare skin of these women?”, Daniels replied “only their top dresses were raised”. Contrary to the usual practice, “the women were whipped on top of their clothing”. Also concerned by the white women’s honor, L.M. Fournet testified that he “witnessed it to prevent any false rumors”. In fact, according to Daniels, “several men witnessed the whipping”. The men’s presence at the moment certainly contributed to the fact that “the whipping was more a humiliation than a whipping”⁸⁰². Even if the identity of the women was not disclosed, their race was, along with information on their conviction. Identifying them as white and shoplifters, the paper was obviously trying to get the sympathy of its readers, whom it usually inundated with accounts of Black criminality. No “black mark” of this incident appeared in the records of any of the white women detained at Angola at the time.

⁸⁰¹ Entries #13050, #13081, Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923; Entry #16147, Volume 26, no. 15501-16150, 1926, LSP Collection.

⁸⁰² “Whippings, ‘Wild Parties’ Probed at State Prison”, *The Times-Picayune*, June 19, 1930; “Fournet Traces Vanished Prison Mules for Senate Probers”, *The Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1930. The account of the incident in the Morning Advocate edition is almost identical except that the word ‘ladies’ replace the word ‘lashes’: “Were these ladies administered on the bare skin of these women?” [sic], presenting a revealing lapsus. “Ex-Warden Orders Lash for Convict”, *Morning Advocate*, June 19, 1930.

The following month, on July 21, 1930, Essie May J. and Mary Lou S. took a chance and fled Camp D, only to be both recaptured the same day. They both had received sentences of six to ten years at hard labor. Essie May J. had arrived in May 1929 and probably had a better knowledge of the penitentiary-plantation geography than her accomplice, who had only arrived in February 1930. On their recapture, Captain Willis punished each of them with fifteen lashes, which probably nobody would have tried to disguise as “a light spanking”. Lodie H. and Sylvia C. carried the next attempt three years later, on June 11, 1933. Admitted in March 1933 at LSP for a life sentence, 22-year-old New Orleanian Lodie H. was immediately assigned to work in the yard at camp D. She tried to escape only a few months after her arrival. Her accomplice Sylvia C., convicted in the East Feliciana parish, had arrived at Angola’s Camp D a month prior. Sentenced to four to six years, she was assigned to laboring in the fields at her arrival. Their unsuccessful attempt brought them each twenty-five lashes, a brutal punishment out of all proportion as compared to the change in labor assignment inflicted, only two months later, on a white woman for a similar transgression. On August 11, 1933, Lennie S.M. was “swung from clerk and cook to tailor shop for attempt to escape”, but retrieved her privileged assignment in March 1934⁸⁰³.

The following year, one of the rare recidivists in the female LSP population, Sylviana W., tried to escape. Discharged in October 1932 after a first sentence she had started at 18 in 1930, she came back to Angola in December 1933. On September 12, 1934, twenty-five lashes rewarded the desire for freedom of the “second-termer”. Yet, that same day, two women had managed to leave the penitentiary: Gertrude R. was discharged and Stella M. left on a six-month furlough granted by Governor Allen. Sylviana W.’ discipline record during her first term does not contain any mention of infringement of any rule. However, her good behavior seemed to have worn down during her second term: Captain Willis would punish her again brutally in April 1936 – for “refusing to obey order and disrespect” - and in June 1937 – for “cursing and back talk to prisoner foreman”. On January 2, 1936, another “second-termer” Rosalie A. succeeded in fleeing Camp D not long after her admission for a five-year term. She had previously been incarcerated from May 1928 to May 1931 without a mark in her discipline record. On October 23, 1937, another recidivist, received fifteen lashes for “impudence and leaving camp without permission”.

⁸⁰³ Entries #18854, #19400, Volume 31, no. 18801-19450, 1929-1930; Entry #22468, Volume 36, no. 22051-22699, 1932; Entries #23205, #23341, Volume 37, no. 22701-23350, 1932-1933, LSP Collection.

Estelle R. had spent a first term at Angola laboring in the fields from January 1931 to October 1932, when Governor Allen granted her an indefinite reprieve. Nevertheless, when she was admitted in December 1933 on a second conviction and with a seven-year sentence, the state penitentiary considered that she owed the time she spent outside on reprieve to the institution, which meant she would only be discharged in 1942. During her second term, she was denied parole several times as well as brutally punished several times⁸⁰⁴.

Only a few escape attempts appear in the available archives for the following decades. In March 1955, Dolores T., a white woman and state prisoner since 1953, took advantage of her stay at Charity Hospital to escape. She must have been recaptured in the streets of New Orleans because she appeared in *The Angolite* later that year⁸⁰⁵. On September 5, 1955, Theresa A., another white prisoner, tried to escape Camp D but was recaptured⁸⁰⁶. A few months later, she tried again, this time in company of another white prisoner, Maxine C. They were both recaptured the same day one mile away from Camp D⁸⁰⁷. The female columnist in *The Angolite* commented on their attempt by stating: “the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence”⁸⁰⁸. The severity of the punishment for escapes had increased over the decades: they were now considered prosecutable offences. The West Feliciana Grand Jury found both white women guilty of simple escape charges and gave them both two additional years to serve consecutively with their terms⁸⁰⁹. In June 1958, Maxine Cole was tried again in the West Feliciana parish on a charge of escape and public intimidation, suggesting that she allegedly employed violence against a penitentiary staff member⁸¹⁰.

⁸⁰⁴ Entry #17903, Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928; Entries #20418, #20476, Volume 33, no. 20101-20749, 1930-1931; Entry #22749, Volume 37, no. 22701-23350, 1932-1933; Entry #23876, Volume 38, no. 23351-23999, 1933; Entries #24192, #24193, Volume 39, no. 24001-24650, 1933-1934; Entry #26151, Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936, LSP Collection.

⁸⁰⁵ “Prisoner Confined to Hospital Flees”, *The Times-Picayune*, March 28, 1955; *The Angolite*, November 5, 1955.

⁸⁰⁶ Warden’s monthly report to Director of Institutions, 16 September 1955, folder 33, Collection P1981-497, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁸⁰⁷ Warden’s monthly report to Director of Institutions, 1 February 1956, folder 33, Collection P1981-497, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁸⁰⁸ *The Angolite*, January 28, 1956.

⁸⁰⁹ “Convict Is Given Five More Years For Intimidation”, *State Times Advocate*, March 31, 1956.

⁸¹⁰ “Former Employee of Penitentiary Goes on Trial”, *State Times Advocate*, June 2, 1958.

It is no coincidence that so few women, Black and white, attempted to run away from Angola during their incarceration. In addition to the remoteness of the penitentiary-plantation, the Mississippi river provided a natural security barrier often rendering escape attempts fatal⁸¹¹. The current was strong, and the river was populated with snakes and alligators. Diverted of its primary function of travel and communication, the river could become the final resting-place for escapees. Not unlike the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean retaining the “oceanic remnants of the middle passage and the transatlantic slave trade”⁸¹², the Mississippi river - the waterway for the “second Middle Passage”, i.e. the domestic slave trade - constitutes a landscape for Black lives, connecting Angola prisoners to ancestors who had drowned before them.

For a long time, historians believed that enslaved Black individuals “were so completely ignorant of geography and relative distances” that escaping from the plantation where they were captives was nearly impossible⁸¹³. The vision of the hegemonic nature of slaveholders’ power had been debunked by historical research demonstrating that enslaved people working on the “unmaking of slavery” had always contested that power and that their use of “a rival geography” was at the core of their resistance. Mobility on slave plantations and in other places of confinement was exercised at great risk, and slave movement was limited, monitored, criminalized. Nevertheless, the enslaved learned the geographies of their “cages” and this geographical knowledge would be crucial for runaways⁸¹⁴. Not unlike the enslaved’s acts of illicit mobility, women’s attempted escapes at Angola used their knowledge of geography and topography of the area, which is why a new comer could not do it. Their escapes were meant to contest power. They were moments of possibility when freedom could be glimpsed. In those moments, women’s desire for liberty was so great that they braved danger to realize it⁸¹⁵. Not unlike enslaved women before them, by

⁸¹¹ “Angola’s Penitentiary Press”, by Hugh Mulligan, *The Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1953.

⁸¹² McKittrick and Woods, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, 4.

⁸¹³ E. Dolorus Preston Jr., “The Genesis of the Underground Railroad”, 1933, quoted by McKittrick and Woods, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, 100.

⁸¹⁴ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*.

⁸¹⁵ Micah Grace Khater’s recent dissertation maps Black women’s fugitive geographies. Khater, “*Unable to Find Any Trace of Her*”: *Black Women, Genealogies of Escape, and Alabama Prisons, 1920 – 1950*, PhD dissertation, Departments of African American Studies and History, Yale University, 2022.

escaping, Angola women were trying “to defend their bodies and womanhood against exploitation”⁸¹⁶.

The institution did not rely uniquely on the peculiar geographies of the penitentiary-plantation to deter prisoners from running away. At various points, the control over the prisoners’ overseers was reinforced. For instance, in the early 1910s, “the Board found it necessary to adopt a rule imposing a fine upon the captain in charge where it was shown the escape was due to the negligence of any of the employees under him. This rule has had a tendency to minimize escapes”⁸¹⁷. The next “innovation” was the introduction of the trusty system, also called “convict-guards system”, which was already in use at Parchman penal farm in Mississippi⁸¹⁸. General manager Fuqua boasted about his decision: “The system of Trusty Guards, inaugurated about a year ago, has worked admirably, and is saving this institution a large amount of money, at the same time giving to a large number of prisoners opportunity to better their living conditions”⁸¹⁹. By reducing the paid staff at Angola from a total of more than one hundred and fifty to less than twenty-five, the institution was indeed saving a lot of money, but also increasing the number of people who looked for a personal gain by “bullying” and brutalizing other prisoners. By 1923, the number of employed guards was eleven and it was increased by only eight between then and 1952⁸²⁰.

Trusties were part of a reward system, and had to conform to the institution’s policies to benefit from it, even when it meant killing prisoners who attempted to run away⁸²¹. It became “the most vicious of all [...] blame-worthy conditions at Angola”⁸²². Male trusty guards were armed instead

⁸¹⁶ Bell, *Running from Bondage: Enslaved Women and their Remarkable Fight for Freedom in Revolutionary America*, 13.

⁸¹⁷ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 74.

⁸¹⁸ McWhorter, “The Trusty.”

⁸¹⁹ Report made by Hy. L. Fuqua, General Manager of the State Penitentiary to the Governor and General Assembly of Louisiana for the Regular Session of 1918 Covering the Biennial Period of 1916 and 1917, Call number HV8338 A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 25.

⁸²⁰ Allgood, “A Sociological Analysis of the Transition of the Louisiana Penal System”, 53.

⁸²¹ Mouledous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System.”

⁸²² “Juvenile Judge Talks on Angola”, *The Times-Picayune*, April 21, 1951.

of living ‘under the gun’. It is unclear if female trusty guards also received a weapon to enforce their power over the other women prisoners, but unlike the male trusties who had access to better housing conditions than the ‘gunmen’, they were housed within the same women’s quarters. Over the period 1925-1936, records show that eleven Black women and two white women were assigned to security at Camp D, occupying the position of gate and yard woman, gate keeper, or guard. All of them had been convicted of crimes against persons. The great majority of them seemed to have benefitted from this assignment with an earlier release: two of them were paroled, three others were discharged on a reprieve, two were pardoned, and another one received a commutation⁸²³.

The institution also relied on informants recruited among prisoners to report on their cellmates’ illegal activities and suspicious behaviors. Warden Jones wrote in one of his official reports:

An important part of our precautions was the organization of a system of intelligence to check trouble before it makes any headway. Manufacture of home-made knives and weapons, counterfeiting coins, conspiracies to escape or to foment trouble, are among the activities thus controlled and kept down⁸²⁴.

However, the most powerful deterrent of all might have been the dogs used to trail prisoners who ran away. Packs of bloodhounds were kept on all of the penal farms operated by the State of Louisiana (at Angola and elsewhere) and at the receiving station in Baton Rouge. Training of these “man hunters” was an everyday affair according to a newspaper reporting that this served two purposes: “One is to keep the dogs in trim and the other is to impress on the convicts the fact that if one should attempt to escape he will be recaptured”⁸²⁵. The reputation of Angola dogs became such that they were sent on duty all around the state of Louisiana, as well as to neighboring Mississippi⁸²⁶. In 1944, Warden D.D. Bazer participated in a dog show held at New

⁸²³ Entry #11253, Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923; Entry #14851, Volume 25, no. 14603-15500, 1923-1925; Entries #15548, #15566, #15918, Volume 26, no. 15501-16150, 1926; Entries #16176, #16492, Volume 27, no. 16151-16824, 1925-1926; Entry #18057, Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928; Entry #18921, Volume 31, no. 18801-19450, 1929-1930; Entry #20711, Volume 33, no. 20101-20749, 1930-1931; Entry #21793, Volume 35, no. 21401-22050, 1931-1932; Entries #24169, #24231, Volume 39, no. 24001-24650, 1933-1934, LSP Collection.

⁸²⁴ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 17.

⁸²⁵ “Where Felons Pay Debts They Owe to Society”, by W.D. Robinsin, *The Times-Picayune*, September 4, 1921.

⁸²⁶ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. See page 16.

Orleans Fair Grounds to “demonstrate the use of bloodhounds in manhunts”⁸²⁷. Recent research has uncovered the white supremacist origins of the use of interspecies violence. Bloodhounds in particular have been bred for their ferocity, and trained to hunt non-white human beings, attack, inflict wounds and even kill them. The practice has its origins in the Spanish colonization of the Caribbean where dogs helped to decimate Indigenous populations. Largely used in sugar plantations all over the Caribbean to control enslaved Africans and their descendants, they were imported in the Americas to serve the same purpose. Over the centuries, bloodhounds became a very efficient, although particularly cruel, way to quell Black resistance. Even more dehumanizing than the lash and the shackles, dog attacks animalized humans by transforming them into prey. “Dogs enforced plantation regimens through quotidian intimidation and closed off fugitive landscapes”. They were used in the fields to extract more labor from Black people who learned to dread them more than the lash. Enslaved African Americans had developed innovative methods to confuse dogs’ smell. In addition to wading in the water, they would use pepper, onion, or turpentine⁸²⁸. These recipes were certainly passed down generations. At least on one occasion, a prisoner used a mixture of turpentine and garlic to confuse Angola dogs in the thick woods of Tunica Hills⁸²⁹.

As slave hunters and slave patrols acquired dogs in the Southern states, it became a profitable business to breed “man hunters” and condition them to specifically target slaves. Dogs therefore became whites’ allies in enforcing African Americans’ repression during slavery and the Civil War, and they found their ways in Southern local police forces to continue assuming their political function after Emancipation. This sadistic and racialized practice, inherited from settler colonialism and slavery, and striking during the Civil Rights Movement has continued to this day, including at Angola⁸³⁰.

⁸²⁷ “Spring Dog Show Will Open Today”, *The Times-Picayune*, March 25, 1944.

⁸²⁸ Parry and Yingling, “Slave Hounds and Abolition in the Americas” Quote on page 71.

⁸²⁹ Hamilton and Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary*, 44.

⁸³⁰ Spruill, “Slave Patrols, ‘Packs of Negro Dogs’ and Policing Black Communities” Angola continues to use dogs as “manhunters”. See: “Prison Dogs of Angola”, by Fred R. Conrad, *The New York Times*, June 9, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/09/opinion/angola-prison-dogs.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage> Accessed September 5, 2022. On the use of dogs as a weapon on war, see Johnson. ““You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat”: Waging Inter-American Wars of Torture and Terror”.

Figure 5.5: Series of photographs by Andrew D. Lytle (undated) representing bloodhound dogs chasing a Black male prisoner





Source: Andrew D. Lytle's Baton Rouge Photograph collection. Used with permission of Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University.

Given the challenges posed by the geography of the penitentiary-plantation, as well as the presence of armed guards and of bloodhound dogs trained to run after the escapees, the decision to escape required an assessment of the risks entailed by leaving the camp. Escape attempts were exceptional because the incarcerated knew very well they could fail. They could be recaptured and severely punished. They could be harmed or killed during their attempt by the penitentiary free personnel as well as armed trustees who would not hesitate to shoot because they could benefit themselves from the “catch” with extra good time and an earlier release. Their bodies could be torn into pieces by the dogs at the end of a breathless run, or else eaten up by alligators while attempting to cross the Mississippi.

Nevertheless, the exceptional nature of these attempts does not mean that escaping the penitentiary-plantation was not everybody's hope⁸³¹. Some might have waited for an opportunity

⁸³¹ And not a symptom of “drapetomania”, a form of nervous disorder that Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright, professor at the University of Louisiana, thought to be the cause of the desire to flee observed among enslaved African Americans in the 1850s. Woods, *Development Arrested*, 54, 300–301.

to slip away that never came. Some others might have to “choose” to remain under the brutal circumstances of Camp D until their discharge by the institution because it seemed the safest way to stay alive and to be able to see the outside world again. Freedom was most probably everybody’s hope, but for some women at Camp D, freedom never came. The last section of this chapter is a humble attempt of a tribute to these women whose bodies remained where they had been confined.

5.5 Buried in Angola ground

Before Angola, they were sex workers in the New Orleans restricted vice district called Storyville, and its back-of-town Black section, turning tricks for a few dollars a day in a mansion on Basin Street or for a few cents in a crib. They were farm laborers and field hands in Northwest or Southwest Louisiana working for sunrise to sundown in the fields. They were housekeepers, cooks, house girls, toiling in white homes all over the state of Louisiana⁸³².

Before Angola, they were mothers. They always rushed home after long hours of work to take care of the little ones. They insisted on sending their children to school so they could know more than they did, and make a better life for themselves, while the white boss was always asking for more field hands. They felt guilty because they lost babies from fever, from colic, the herbal medicine did not work this time, and they did not have money to send for a doctor. They were wondering where their kids were, since nobody could take care of them after they were jailed and the sheriff would not tell them. They were wondering how their children got along with the relatives who had agreed to take them in. They were wondering how their daughters and sons were doing without them, they could not write home to ask, as they did not even know how to write. They wrote long letters home every Sunday pretending everything was alright here. They

⁸³² The storytelling (providing a “choir effect”) in this section is inspired by Julie Otsuka’s in her novel about Japanese “picture brides”. Otsuka, *The Buddha in the Attic*.

were torturing themselves every night thinking about their children left behind, worrying constantly about their well-being, their safety, their future. Did they have enough to eat? Who will pay for their shoes so they can go to school? They were smiling inside thinking about their little ones' faces and babbling. They were finding comfort remembering the tender moments when their babies slept in their arms.

Before Angola, they were wives, lovers, and girlfriends. They were scared every night that their lovers came back drunk from the saloon. They were abused, insulted, screamed after, beaten and raped at home. They were cuddled, comforted, loved, even cherished. They were in everything with their old man, even if it meant sawing jail bars. They did not know what happened to their partners. They hoped they would visit soon but everyday passed with less and less hope, why didn't they write back? They were wondering how they could juggle the kids, their job, while they didn't even know how to cook. They had a feeling another woman might have taken their spot in their beds, and even worse in their hearts. How could they blame them? They were gone for so long. They missed their smell. They so wish they could cry on their shoulder and sleep in their arms. They were left alone, so long without even an embrace.

They died from sickness: cirrhosis of liver, cancer of stomach, tuberculosis, intracranial tumor, arterio sclerosis, malarial fever, influenza complicated with broncho pneumonia, tubercular peritonitis, typhoid fever and syphilis. The prison physician might have said it was because of "their former lives and habits have been largely spent in debauchery and improper living"⁸³³. They died by suicide. They were killed by a falling tree. At least, that is what the records state. Only their companions knew they died of exhaustion, of brutal treatment, of poor food, of absent medical care. They died of loneliness, of despair, and of discouragement.

They might "have been placed in a plain, but decent, coffin and interred in a cemetery where flowers bloom continuously and where neatness and order are the watchword"⁸³⁴. The penitentiary chaplain might have conducted a funeral service for them.

⁸³³ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans.

⁸³⁴ Source: Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 43.

Their names were Mariah (18-year-old), Audrey (29), Lutie (20), Mattie (24), Amelia (37), Estella (22), Susie (28), Bessie (27), Ann (19), Lizzie (55), Sarah (23), Cataline (19), Alval (27), Beatrice (29), Carrie Lilly (30)... and Jack's wife (26)⁸³⁵.

And their futures were stolen.

Conclusion of chapter 5

The Angola cemetery, Point Lookout, served as a burial ground for the individuals who died while incarcerated, and whose bodies relatives did not claim. A quick ceremony performed by the prison chaplain would close the episode of their presence at the penitentiary, while a few prisoners were requisitioned to bury the body. In total, over the period 1901-1935, seventeen women died, fourteen of them Black. None received a mention in the press, let alone an obituary. The only deaths reported in the newspapers were of (male) prisoners who died during an escape attempt. On these occasions, prisoners were systematically framed as guilty and deserving to die. But every year, men and women died at Angola, and their remains were placed in the prison cemetery, far away from the places they had called home.

Point Lookout had a particular aura of mystery to the prisoners. In 1953, *The Angolite* received a communication from an "outsider residing in Baton Rouge" stating that "there were 28 or more bodies, buried in a common, unmarked grave at the cemetery [...] between 1915 and 1925 [...] of men (and perhaps women) [who] had died at the old 'Walls' in Baton Rouge". The prison newspaper reported speculations among prisoners, especially long-termers, about the occupants

⁸³⁵ Entries #88, #452, #2088, #2451, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entries #3926, #4021, #5278, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911; Entries #7643, #8391, #8615, #8682, #8935, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916; Entries #10110, #11238, #11868, Volume 18, no. 9901-12855, 1916-1921; Entries #14381, Volume 19, no. 12856-15643, 1921-1925; Entry #17086, Volume 28, no. 16825-17500, 1926-1927; Entry #18397, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929; Entry #24822, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935, LSP Collection.

of this unmarked grave, invisible because it was covered with grass⁸³⁶. Someone put forward that there were “men who were killed at old Camp I years ago”, another said: “Those are Indian bodies, buried there long ago after their bones were found on the farm”, and the operator of a dragline excavator confirmed having found human remains in the field. To add to the “thrills and chills” of the scene, this site was said to be located “immediately in front of that of the former Angola convict-physician who committed suicide by slashing his throat with a razor in 1934”⁸³⁷. The “convict-physician” was Charles Clay Howell, a white male prisoner, assigned to Angola hospital as a steward, and who had in fact committed suicide by poisoning himself, probably with substances found at the hospital⁸³⁸. During a previous suicide attempt in 1927, Howell had already taken chemicals he had access to as a hospital steward at the penitentiary receiving station in Baton Rouge⁸³⁹. The circumstances of his death might have been forgotten some twenty years later, but prisoners still remembered their caring “Doc” who had thought to leave in his last note the names of some prisoners who were in need of medical care⁸⁴⁰. On several other occasions, prisoners reported ghostly apparitions and eerie sounds⁸⁴¹. A widespread rumor among prisoners and staff alike was that “the old levee to the west of Angola [was] literally built of bones of convicts who were killed during its construction many years ago”⁸⁴². These anecdotes suggest that in their own ways, prisoners were aware of, and haunted by, the sufferings of the people who had been living in these very same places before them. The ever-present violence and oppression had left marks not only on the individuals’ bodies and minds, but also on the land itself. Perhaps, ghosts were only a manifestation of “modernity’s violence and wounds” inflicted through settler colonialism, slavery, incarceration; ghosts were how something invisible made itself known⁸⁴³.

⁸³⁶ Individual markers were only installed beginning in 1938.

⁸³⁷ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 21, August 15, 1953.

⁸³⁸ Death Report, Volume 21, 1928-1948, LSP Collection.

⁸³⁹ “Woman’s Slayer Ends His Life at Angola Hospital”, *The Times-Picayune*, January 16, 1934.

⁸⁴⁰ “Penitentiary Life-Termer, Hospital Steward, Ends Life by Poisoning”, *State Time Advocate*, January 16, 1934.

⁸⁴¹ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 18, July 25, 1953, & no 23, August 29, 1953.

⁸⁴² *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 21, August 15, 1953.

⁸⁴³ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 24–25.

The exploration of Black women's spatial experiences demonstrated a range of material boundaries erected to oppress them as well as a range of behaviors on their part deployed to challenge these boundaries. Often not considered by LSP management and by state officials when "thinking" the penitentiary and its physical features such as housing facilities, Black women had to find their place in a male-dominated and racially segregated environment, where they occupied the least privileged position and they were the most vulnerable to abuse. Nevertheless, they asserted their agency, and they resisted by contesting authority and seeking freedom. Over the course of six decades of their presence at Angola, Black women's spatial experiences were impacted by very minor changes in the quarters they were confined to. The overcrowded conditions prevailing during and after the Great Depression meant that their dormitories were even less adequate than they had been when built in 1901. The succeeding years brought few renovations and much degradation to the building at Camp D. It was only in 1956 when new quarters were opened ('the Willows') that incarcerated Black women's material conditions would improve, although the penitentiary authorities made sure that these improvements were of less magnitude than what white women would get in their new quarters. For six decades, Angola marked racial and gendered differences among state prisoners through spatial organization and rigid segregation.

As much as prisoners interact with their physical environment, making their own sense of space, they also engage with time, which does not simply pass as the sentence is served⁸⁴⁴. In the next two chapters, I will describe Black women's experiences of time. More specifically, I will discuss how long Black women stayed at Angola and what it meant for them "to do time" at Angola during Jim Crow.

⁸⁴⁴ Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 306–7.

PART III

EXPERIENCES OF TIME

According to criminologist Diana Medlicott, “in terms of the prison experience, the temporal and spatial aspects of existence [...] are experienced synthetically” and “the prison is a sophisticated time-place, where the temporal and the spatial characteristics are structurally productive of prison life and culture”. For instance in the previous chapter, it was observed that escapes only occurred after the prisoner had spent a few months at the penitentiary-plantation, a delay necessary to learn the geography of her cage and assess the risk entailed by her illegal act of mobility. Therefore, “Separating the time relationship from the place relationship is only justifiable analytically”, which is the approach this project privileged⁸⁴⁵.

Time is central to the experience of incarceration, as suggested by the popular expression “doing time”⁸⁴⁶. Since Clemmer’s 1940 pioneer work on ‘prisonization’, time has been largely studied by scholars interested in prison⁸⁴⁷. Time is understood to be “the basic structuring dimension of prison life”⁸⁴⁸. The control exercised in prison limits the capacity for the incarcerated to make decisions about their day and night activities, i.e. how they spend time, an idea developed by Foucault around the concept of discipline⁸⁴⁹. However, studies (particularly in the fields of

⁸⁴⁵ Medlicott, “Surviving in the Time Machine: Suicidal Prisoners and the Pains of Prison Time”, 216.

⁸⁴⁶ Moran, “‘Doing Time’ in Carceral Space”, 305.

⁸⁴⁷ Clemmer, *The Prison Community*; Ricordeau, “« Faire son temps » et « attendre »”, 58.

⁸⁴⁸ Sparks, R., Bottoms, A. and Hay, W. (1996): Prisons and the Problem of Order, quoted by Moran, “‘Doing Time’ in Carceral Space”, 309.

⁸⁴⁹ Foucault, *Surveiller et punir : naissance de la prison*.

sociology and criminology) have demonstrated that there is diversity among how individuals experience time spent in prison. For instance, sociologist Gwenola Ricordeau found out that:

The experience of carceral time varies according to the fact that the individual is convicted or simply accused, according to the time already spent in detention, according to the time ‘done’ on the term and what’s left to do, whether the person knows the date of their release or not, or depending on the institution. However, the experience of time also varies according to gender (in particular because of biological procreation differences), according to age, and according to individual resources (intellectual for instance)⁸⁵⁰.

Angola’s Black female prisoners’ experiences of time are to be understood through the lens of power relations existing on the penitentiary-plantation and beyond. Political scientist Michael Hanchard argued that: “Time, when linked to relations of dominance and subordination, is another social construct that marks inequality between various social groups”⁸⁵¹. Philosopher Charles Mills, building on Hanchard’s argument, proposed that, like space, time could be racialized:

a racial regime (racial slavery, colonial forced labor, Jim Crow, or apartheid polities) imposes, *inter alia*, particular dispositions and allocations of time that are differentiated by race: working times, eating and sleeping times, free times, commuting times, waiting times, and ultimately, of course, living and dying times⁸⁵².

To be sure, “racial time” which Hanchard defines as “the inequalities of temporality that result from power relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups” is not only to be observed in spaces of confinement like Angola, but also exists in the outside world. During Jim Crow, Black women’s large presence in the labor market - the consequence of economic disparities - and their over-representation in the domestic service - the result of racial discrimination - produced a temporality opposed to white women’s temporality, which was mostly marked by domesticity. While white women had their own set of gender expectations to meet in order to be considered respectable, their time was dedicated to the well-being of their

⁸⁵⁰ [our translation from] L’expérience du temps carcéral varie selon que la personne est prévenue ou condamnée, selon le temps déjà passé en détention ou la durée de la peine déjà effectuée et celle qui reste à purger, selon que la personne condamnée dispose d’une date de sortie ou non (réclusion criminelle à perpétuité) et selon le type d’établissement d’affectation. Mais le temps vécu dépend aussi du sexe (en particulier du rythme différentiel de la procréation chez les hommes et chez les femmes), de l’âge et des ressources individuelles (notamment intellectuelles). In: Ricordeau, “« Faire son temps » et « attendre »”, 60.

⁸⁵¹ Hanchard, “Afro-Modernity”, 253.

⁸⁵² Mills, “White Time”, 28.

own household, something that was not possible for Black women who had to work outside of their homes to make ends meet. Other conditions imposed by Jim Crow, such as spatial segregation of the housing market, also influenced the time spent to commute between home and work, the time spent caring for children and other relatives, the time left for social activities and leisure, and the time dedicated to racial and political struggles. Therefore, time can be understood as dominated by the imposition of white temporality, and defined as “a permanent anti-Black enemy, [...] a weapon of anti-Black violence”⁸⁵³.

In the following two chapters, we will explore how the control over prison time was external to the prisoner, i.e. it was controlled by the judge who sentenced for a certain length of time, by prison officials and others who decided on discharge, and on a daily basis by guards, matrons and captains who enforced the penal regime. The two following chapters also examine how the African American women confined at Angola coped with prison time and attempted to reclaim some temporal freedom and to exert control over time themselves. These constitute “overlapping temporalities” between the imposed clock time materialized in the repetitive character of the everyday discipline and work schedule and the small and bigger events – some of them provoked by prisoners themselves - that served as time markers⁸⁵⁴. In other words, time in prison is both a lived experience and a deliberately managed experience.

More precisely, chapter 6 will examine time constraints resulting from sentencing practices and discharge practices (what I call the various “exit scenarios”) as well as the strategies deployed by women to reduce their own time in captivity. Chapter 7 will discuss the daily schedule imposed on Black female captives at Angola, and the centrality of labor in their experience of time. The range of labor assignments held by Black women on the penitentiary-plantation answers a racialized and gendered logic, as many other aspects of the discipline at Angola. In both chapters, the central argument is that captivity and coercion as well as a strictly imposed schedule made it challenging for the incarcerated to structure their time and create their own routines in a similar

⁸⁵³ Calvin Warren, “Time for Black Studies Symposium: Time, Temporality and Black Life”, Princeton University, Department of African American Studies, January 2021. I want to thank Rahsaan Mahadeo, 21st Century Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Sociology at Georgetown University for inviting me to attend this symposium.

⁸⁵⁴ Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 48–50.

fashion to people on the outside, although attempts to reclaim control over time can be detected in their participation in some of their activities and in their acts of resistance.

CHAPTER 6

BLACK WOMEN ‘DOING TIME’ AT ANGOLA

This chapter will discuss how time was externally controlled, both by the judiciary, embodied by the lower court (parish) judges who sentenced women for a certain length of time, and by the penitentiary authorities whose decisions affected the date and circumstances of the women’s release (what I called the various “exit scenarios”). Chapter 6 presents statistical data from the Angola Women’s Database, as well as individual examples to illustrate the different scenarios observed among the female population. From this mostly quantitative analysis, it appears that the time served by Black (and white) women was greatly individualized through the power of the courts as well as the power of penitentiary authorities and other actors (such as the State Governor, or the Board of Parole) at the back-end of the prison-sentence chronology⁸⁵⁵. There was both a wide diversity of sentences determined by parish courts (which at times equal to great inequalities as the example of manslaughter illustrates in section 6.3), as well as a great back-end discretion, which had a greater impact on the actual time served by prisoners than the judicial sentence. At the collective level, back-end discretion had an impact on the carceral population present in the institution, which was at times a concern for LSP officials. It was the case notably during the Great Depression, when overcrowding became common in U.S. prisons, and when LSP officials took special measures to reduce the carceral population at Angola, including in the women’s camp. Considering today’s mass incarceration issue, examining back-end discretion seems particularly relevant, because in 2022, “for the majority of [U.S.] prisoners in some states,

⁸⁵⁵ I use the expression “back-end” of the prison-sentence chronology to refer to decisionmakers (such as parole boards or departments of correction) who have discretion on time served after judicial decisions have been finalized. See: Reitz et al., “American Prison-Release Systems: Indeterminacy in Sentencing and the Control of Prison Population Size.”

parole boards and departments of correction have more to say about actual sentence length than judges and prosecutors combined”. Therefore, prison-release discretion has been “one of the major causal engines of prison growth” and can also become a tool for reductions in prison size.

6.1 Time ‘to do’: Sentences determined by the parish courts

Altogether, between 1901 and 1935, the parish courts of Louisiana sentenced 897 Black women who received either determinate or indeterminate sentences. Their cumulative terms correspond to a period of 859,215 to 1,188,675 days⁸⁵⁶. In addition, sixty-six other Black women from thirty-eight parishes received life or death sentences (the latter being all commuted to life sentences afterwards). Over the same period, ten white women received life or death sentences from seven parishes, including six parishes that did not sentence any Black woman for the same penitentiary term. It is important to note that the meaning of a life sentence was very different during the period than what it is today, with mandatory and incompressible life sentences⁸⁵⁷. Because of different mechanisms guaranteeing an earlier release (to be examined later in this chapter), “lifers” were actually not expected to serve life sentences during Jim Crow. However, it is utterly possible that, when first convicted, these women, often kept in the dark about judicial procedures, had no idea that, rather than spending “the remaining of their natural life” at Angola, they would

⁸⁵⁶ The equivalent of 2,354 to 3,256 years. The first number was obtained by the addition of determinate sentences and minimum indeterminate sentences; the second number was obtained by the addition of determinate sentences and maximum indeterminate sentences. For an explanation of indeterminate sentencing, see section 6.1.1 below.

⁸⁵⁷ In 1979, Louisiana changed its legislation to introduce mandatory life sentence without parole for certain categories of crimes. Today, ‘life means life’ and 14% of the Louisiana incarcerated population can expect to die in prison. Most of the Louisiana “lifers” are at Angola. See “More than 1 in 10 Louisiana prisoners are serving life without parole, highest rate in the U.S.”, *The Advocate*, February 19, 2021. https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/article_e7058664-72d7-11eb-b165-5f6353dd6744.html Accessed December 2, 2021. A recent study found that more than 55,000 Americans are incarcerated in state and federal prisons with no chance of parole, and a significant portion of them are 50 years old or more. In Louisiana, more than two thirds of the elderly serving life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) have already served at least twenty years. Over the past four decades, LWOP became a routine punishment whereas it was a rare sanction beforehand. See: Ashley Nellis, “Nothing But Time: Elderly Americans Serving Life Without Parole”, *The Sentencing Project*, June 23, 2022. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/nothing-but-time-elderly-americans-serving-life-without-parole/> Accessed July 18, 2022.

be out after a decade or so. This means that the psychological impact of this sentencing practice on the individuals concerned, who thought that they were likely to end their lives in the penitentiary, was tremendous. It is also plausible that this had an impact on the public, at least in part, who probably found satisfaction in the belief that those adjudged murderers and rapists were removed once and for all from society. Statistics show an equivalent number of women sentenced to life or death in every decade examined. The following table details the age category of these women, and illustrates the reluctance of the courts to sentence young white women to life or death, while almost a third of the Black women who were thus sentenced were in their teens⁸⁵⁸.

Table 6.1: Age category for women admitted to LSP 1901-1935 with a life or death sentence (n=76), according to race

Age category (age at admission)	Black women	White women	Total women
12-15	4	0	4
16-21	21	1	22
22-30	24	4	28
31-40	11	5	16
41-50	6	0	6
Total age categories	66	10	76

Source: Angola Women's Database

For the most part, individuals receiving sentences other than life were also discharged before the end of their term, thanks to different mechanisms permitting them to leave LSP before the date determined by the parish judge. Indeed, one of the strategies employed by LSP officials to obtain compliance and discipline from prisoners was to adjust the time they were expected to stay at LSP, with time off for hard labor and respecting the rules. The hope of getting out as early as possible was naturally on everybody's mind, thereby increasing the relative success of these strategies. In the 1930s, General Manager Himes stated in an official report: "Work Out Your

⁸⁵⁸ The New Orleans House of Good Shepherd held Black and white girls judged for misdemeanors in this city. An Industrial School for Girls was created in 1926 to hold white delinquent youth. The State Industrial School for Colored Youth opened its girls' facilities only in 1956. For information on the New Orleans reformatory, see: Calvanico, "Carceral Girlhoods"; Simmons, *Crescent City Girls*, chap. 5.

Own Salvation. One of the First Things taught a convict is that he works his way out of the penitentiary. The judge's sentence is the maximum he may have to serve. How much sooner he will be released depends on him"⁸⁵⁹. This statement suggested that the prisoner's labor was the only factor determining the sentence they would serve. In reality, a lot of others factors came into account, and this section and the following one will allow us to grasp some of them. Before examining the variety of release mechanisms that made it possible for Black women to leave the penitentiary-plantation before the sentence imposed by the court was completed, a look at the sentences they actually received in their parish of conviction will allow us to take note of their diversity of punishments imposed, including those for women convicted of the same type of offenses. The example of women convicted of manslaughter presented later in this chapter (section 6.3) will reveal the inequity of the justice served by parish courts, which demonstrated varied degrees of severity in the determination of the sentences, an inequity that was sometimes reinforced, and at other times redressed, by penitentiary policies.

6.1.1 The impact of indeterminate sentences

Until the adoption of Acts 123 and 124 by the Louisiana Legislature in 1916, courts had to determine a single sentence (ex: one year of hard labor), whereas after they generally gave a minimum and a maximum sentence (ex: one to three years of hard labor). However, until 1935, the end of the period covered by the records, there were both single (or determinate) sentences and indeterminate sentences coexisting, even sometimes within the same parish criminal courts. The word choice reflects the fact that the judicial sentence decided upon in the courtroom does not determine the actual length of a prison term, which is left in the hands of decisionmakers involved later in the process, for instance penitentiary authorities, parole boards, and the State Governor. However, as section 6.2 will make it clear, even before the adoption of Acts 123 and

⁸⁵⁹ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 10.

124 introducing the indeterminate sentencing in Louisiana legislation, there was a certain degree of indeterminacy in the length of prison terms due to other release mechanisms available such as Good Time or pardon, which also shortened actual time served. Therefore, these new legal provisions did not introduce indeterminacy in itself, but increased the degree of indeterminacy, especially when coupled with other provisions such as parole (see section 6.2.3). In other words, until the final discharge was effective, the term length was always unpredictable to some degree.

The following table presents the judicial sentences, i.e. rendered by parish courts (i.e. lower courts), according to their length. Parish courts sentenced almost half of the Black women listed to terms of less than a year; these correspond mostly to convictions for minor crimes against property.

Table 6.2: Length of judicial sentences for all Black women admitted to LSP 1901-1935 (includes recidivist women) (n=963)

	Minimum sentence	Maximum sentence
Up to 6 months	17.0%	15.6%
7-12 months	31.3%	21.5%
13-24	16.3%	16.2%
25-48	11.6%	14.2%
49-96	11.0%	13.5%
97 or more	5.9%	12.1%
Death sentences	0.2%	0.2%
Life sentences	6.6%	6.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Angola Women's Database

The fact that before 1916 women were more frequently confined to shorter sentences, or had longer sentences reduced, is noteworthy, although it is impossible to assess if this was a direct result of the legislative change or a product of other factors (for instance, changes in the lower court policies or in the parish jail system). Over the period 1901-1915, 22.9 percent of the Black women admitted (n=367) were sentenced for six months or less while only 9.5 percent were sentenced for 97 months or more. Prior to the introduction of indeterminate sentencing, Black

women (exclusive of those who received life and death sentences) were sentenced on average to 30 months of hard labor, while between 1916 and 1935, they were sentenced to an average minimum of 33 and a maximum of 53 months (or in prisoners' time, 895 days opposed to 997-1,588 days). The following table presents these averages according to the type of convictions and reveals that on average, Black women received an original sentence twice as long for crimes against persons (excluding murder cases where death or life sentences were given) as the ones they received for crimes against property. It also shows that the impact of indeterminate sentences might have been higher for sentences concerning crimes against property, since their average increased after 1916 in a larger proportion (the average maximum sentence after 1916 represents an increase by 93.6 percent compared to the average determinate sentence before 1915) than the average length of sentences related to crimes against persons (the average maximum sentence after 1916 represents an increase by 68.3 percent compared to the average determinate sentence before 1915). However, these averages fluctuate every year in great proportions. For clarity purposes, only the two main categories of crimes are presented below, and life and death sentences were excluded from calculation.

Table 6.3: Average length of judicial sentences for Black women admitted to LSP 1901-1935 (life & death sentences excluded) in number of months

	1901-1915		after 1916		
	n	Determinate sentence	n	Minimum sentence	Maximum sentence
Crimes against persons	216	39.4	369	40.8	66.3
Crimes against property	139	17.3	202	22.5	33.5
Total crimes (includes other types)	367	29.8	596	33.2	52.9

Source: Angola Women's Database

The following table presents the median original sentences according to the type of convictions. Together with the table above, it shows that Black women convicted of crimes against persons received judicial sentences that varied greatly in length, a small number of them receiving very long sentences (life sentences excluded). Conversely, Black women convicted of crimes against

property received sentences that were more homogenous in length. Sentence length for both types of crimes increased over time.

This also reveals that, before the introduction of indeterminate sentencing, half of the Black women convicted of crimes against persons, and half of the ones convicted of crimes against property, were sentenced to one year or less, while after 1916, the median sentence dramatically increased for Black women convicted of crimes against persons, reaching two years minimum and three years maximum, but stayed at one year for those convicted of crimes against property. This demonstrates that the introduction of indeterminate sentences resulted in increased severity of punishment for a small proportion of Black women found guilty of manslaughter, attempted murder, and other violent crimes (excluding murder for which they automatically received a life sentence if found guilty).

Table 6.4: Median length of sentence for Black women admitted to LSP 1901-1935 (life & death sentences excluded) in number of months by type of conviction

	1901-1915		after 1916		
	n	Deter- minate sentence	n	Minimum sentence	Maximum sentence
Crimes against persons	216	12.0	369	24.0	36.0
Crimes against property	139	12.0	202	12.0	24.0
Total crimes (includes other types)	367	12.0	596	18.0	36.0

Source: Angola Women's Database

These numbers hide regional disparities, some of which appear in the following tables, detailing the average and median length of sentence according to the types of conviction for the five main parishes of origin.

It appears that sentencing practices varied greatly among the parishes, especially for crimes against persons. Before 1916, Madison parish and Orleans parish were particularly severe when it came to sentencing Black women convicted of crimes against persons (excluding life or death

sentences following a murder conviction), whereas after 1916, Caddo parish and East Baton Rouge parish were the most severe. Among the five main parishes of conviction, East Baton Rouge parish was the lower court among the five where Black women received on average the shortest sentence for crimes against property, especially after 1916. The impact on Black women convicted of crimes against property was felt more in Caddo and Ouachita parishes whose judges were more severe after the introduction of the indeterminate sentence.

Table 6.5: Average length of sentence for Black women admitted to LSP 1901-1935 (life & death sentences excluded) in number of months, by parish, and by type of conviction

Parish	Crimes against persons			Crimes against property		
	1901-1915	1916-1935		1901-1915	1916-1935	
	Determinate sentence	Minimum sentence	Maximum sentence	Determinate sentence	Minimum sentence	Maximum sentence
Caddo	39.7	76.0	122.3	18.4	25.0	43.0
E. Baton Rouge	48.0	72.0	117.6	16.4	17.8	21.9
Madison	64.3	26.2	36.2	n/a	33.6	43.2
Orleans	63.0	49.3	80.6	20.5	21.7	37.5
Ouachita	48.0	54.0	72.5	10.0	23.3	33.8
Total (all 64 parishes)	39.4	40.8	66.3	17.3	22.5	33.5

Source: Angola Women's Database

Table 6.6: Median length of sentence for Black women admitted to LSP 1901-1935 (life & death sentences excluded) in number of months, by parish, and by type of conviction

	Crimes against persons		Crimes against property	
	1901-1915	1916-1935	1901-1915	1916-1935
Parish	Determinate sentence	Minimum sentence	Determinate sentence	Minimum sentence
Caddo	24.0	60.0	12.0	24.0
E. Baton Rouge	12.0	72.0	12.0	12.0
Madison	36.0	12.0	n/a	12.0
Orleans	36.0	36.0	12.0	12.0
Ouachita	60.0	42.0	10.0	15.0
Total (all 64 parishes)	12.0	24.0	12.0	12.0

Source: Angola Women's Database

According to historian Alex Tepperman, indeterminate sentencing was one of the “Progressive Era’s signature criminal justice innovations”. This new legal disposition allowed for a new form of collaboration between judicial and penal institutions: by offering adjustable sentence lengths, judges secured the possibility of early parole from the penitentiary for “compliant, rehabilitated inmates [...] while keeping hold of more obstinate inmates who needed additional treatment”⁸⁶⁰. Criminal law specialist George Fisher asserts that: “the principles of indeterminate sentencing released judges from the obligation to set that sentence with precision” transferring to penitentiary authorities the power to choose when a person would be fit to return to the “free” world⁸⁶¹. The following statement, made by LSP General manager Himes, confirms that the indeterminate sentence served as a tool to reinforce penitentiary control over prisoners’ behaviors during their incarceration:

The court’s sentence is the maximum the convict may be detained and it is not expected that he will really serve that maximum. He may serve it if he is unruly and insubordinate but the law itself contemplates earlier release. The indeterminate sentence is a special provision for the release on probation when it appears that all

⁸⁶⁰ Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows”, 47.

⁸⁶¹ Fisher, *Plea Bargaining’s Triumph*, 129.

interests will be best served by such release. The law provides for the release of convicts before they serve the maximum sentence and there is nothing wrong in it⁸⁶².

The term ‘probation’ here should be read as ‘parole’ since it was the mechanism used to reward prisoners deemed deserving of an earlier release. After their minimum sentence had been completed, prisoners were eligible for parole. However, this was not a guaranteed outcome, as “Acts 123 and 124 do not confer the right to parole”⁸⁶³. The introduction of the indeterminate sentence brought an additional tool to adjust the time an individual spent inside the penitentiary (a practice sometimes referred as individualized sentencing). This reinforced the inequity of treatment of prisoners, despite the claim that it allowed for a rebalancing of terms (i.e. a “cancellation” of the inequity of judicial sentences). Because there was a “wide variance in term sentences for like offenses” determined by the lower courts, the principle of “uniform and just punishment to all evil doers, commensurate with the crime committed” could not be applied, resulting in a “a spirit of rebellion” among prisoners, therefore the indeterminate sentence could (at least in theory) be used to render actual served terms more homogeneous, although in practice this is not what researchers observed⁸⁶⁴.

The introduction of the indeterminate sentence also resulted in more uncertainty for the individuals concerned: how long could they and would they be confined for? In itself, this uncertainty probably had a tremendous psychological impact. This statement made by the Louisiana Attorney General suggests that the indeterminate sentence allowed penitentiary officials not only to assess prisoners’ behavior in prison, but also to judge a second time the man or woman they had in their custody in regard to the crime they were convicted of:

The sincerity and good faith of the applicant, in the observance of these rules and in the discharge of these duties, should be considered, his conscience should be probed, and public policy requires that the Board should be satisfied of the moral as well as the physical risk incident to the release; and the atrociousness of the crime, and the facts and circumstances surrounding it, to the extent that they disclose the true nature and

⁸⁶² Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on pages 6-7.

⁸⁶³ Attorney General to Hon. Robt. H. Marr, Chairman Board of Parole, 13 January 1917, Box 1, Collection P1978-139, Attorney General Correspondence 1916-1917, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁸⁶⁴ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quotes on page 9.

character of the prisoner, are elements which, in my opinion, should enter into the consideration of such cases⁸⁶⁵.

With the passing of Acts 123 and 124 in 1916, Louisiana was late in the adoption of this new legal disposition. Indeed:

[..] by 1900, the Congress of the National Prison Association [had] voted unanimously to endorse indeterminate sentencing [..]. In 1904, only 15% of new inmates received indeterminate sentences, a number that rose to 37% by 1910. Only with the end of World War I did indeterminate sentencing become a widespread practice in American criminal justice, however, with 55% of all state and federal prisoners serving indeterminate sentences in 1923⁸⁶⁶.

Unfortunately, without a complete assessment of all penitentiary records (men and women), it is impossible to verify whether Louisiana used indeterminate sentences differently along gender and racial lines. Some states certainly did choose to use this sort of legal device in a discriminatory way. For instance, in 1913, because of prevailing views on the different natures of men and women, Pennsylvania adopted the Muncy Act:

which stated that any female pleading guilty to or convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment of one year or more must be sentenced to the state prison for women, and that her sentence 'shall be merely a general one... and shall not fix or limit the duration thereof'⁸⁶⁷.

Pennsylvania established its State Industrial Home for Women, where women often served longer sentences and had to wait longer before becoming eligible for parole, as compared to men convicted of similar crimes who were sentenced to fixed minimums and maximums in the state penitentiary⁸⁶⁸. In Louisiana, after 1916, men and women could receive sentences with fixed minimums and maximums, although sentencing judges also continued to use determinate sentences. On the whole, the outcome was an increase in the length of sentences rendered by parish courts for Black women. Nevertheless, great disparities existed across the sentences received by Black women admitted to LSP. Different factors can explain this, although it is

⁸⁶⁵ Attorney General to Hon. Robt. H. Marr, Chairman Board of Parole, 13 January 1917, Box 1, Collection P1978-139, Attorney General Correspondence 1916-1917, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁸⁶⁶ Statistics from Margaret Cahalan, *Historical Corrections Statistics in the United States, 1850-1984*, 1984. Quoted by Tepperman, "Strange Bedfellows", 47.

⁸⁶⁷ Feinman, *Women in the Criminal Justice System*, 6–7.

⁸⁶⁸ The differences in sentencing practices for men and women were declared to be unconstitutional by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1968. *Commonwealth v. Daniel*, 1968.

impossible to assess their relative importance without examining the penal system in Louisiana as a whole. As this research only examines penitentiary admissions, and only those of women, as well as detailed information on only some of their court cases, this limits the possibility of drawing firm conclusions. Nevertheless, some avenues for interpretation emerge, such as the distinctions between crimes against persons and crimes against property (presented above in tables 6.3 to 6.6) and the distinctions among the parishes of conviction (presented above in tables 6.5 and 6.6). The example of manslaughter convictions presented in a further section (6.3) will allow for a more detailed analysis of sentencing practices.

The following section proposes to examine the different release mechanisms that allowed prisoners to leave LSP before the date determined by the parish judge. Below, some statistics will help us grasp the extent of this phenomenon, quite common in the penal system. Over the period, with the adoption of legislation or institutional policies, more methods of release (or exit scenarios) became available. This situation brought new sources of hope to the incarcerated, all the while resulting in the complication of options that each individual had to consider, understand, assess and apply. While waiting for the fruits of their efforts, they had to demonstrate cooperation with the penitentiary authorities and to obey the rules.

6. 2 Time ‘done’ and exit scenarios

As mentioned above, over the period 1901-1935, 897 Black women received determinate or indeterminate sentences, for a cumulative period of 859,215 (minimum) to 1,188,675 days (maximum). However, these women actually spent altogether 537,905 days at LSP, the equivalent of 62.6 percent of the combined minimum sentences, or 45.3 percent of the combined maximum sentences, which means that, on average, they were serving at LSP only half of the original term imposed by the parish court where they were convicted. As we will see in the next section, this average hides discrepancies depending on the “exit scenarios”, i.e. the motive of

their discharge. It is important to note that the time they had spent in the parish jail before their transfer to the penitentiary (which could for some of them amount to a few months) was not counted off the term they had to serve at LSP. Also noteworthy is the inclusion of the time served on parole, i.e. outside of the penitentiary. The total number of days (inside LSP & outside on parole) in which Black women were under the control of the LSP management was 793,511, the equivalent of 92.4 percent of the combined minimum sentences, or 66.8 percent of the combined maximum sentences. We will come back later to the consequences of these figures when discussing the mechanism of parole. The following table shows that, despite longer sentences imposed by lower courts on white women (explained by the fact that among white women charged with crimes, only the most serious white female lawbreakers were convicted and sentenced to hard labor at the state penitentiary), white women actually spent on average a shorter time than Black women at LSP (520 days compare to 599 days), representing a much lower portion of their original sentence (53.3 percent compare to 68.6 percent)⁸⁶⁹.

Table 6.7: Average sentences for all women admitted 1901-1935 (except for life & death sentences), by race, in number of days (n=980)

	Black women (n=897)	white women (n=83)	Total women (n=980)
Average original minimum sentence	957.9	1091.9	969.2
Average original maximum sentence	1325.2	1517.7	1341.5
Average time served inside (adjusted)	599.7	520.4	593.0
Average of time served inside expressed in % of original maximum sentence	68.6%	53.3%	67.3%

Source: Angola Women's Database

When entering the penitentiary, women (like men) could not know precisely when they would be released, and under which provision (except those who received a sentence shorter than eleven months, who had to complete their full term). Different exit scenarios could apply, as presented in the following table. Half of the Black women benefited from the Good Time law, which was the standard disposition applied to everyone who had a sentence equal to or longer than twelve months and who was serving their first penitentiary term. In proportion, Black women were

⁸⁶⁹ Nicole Rafter addresses the issue of courts labeling Black women as criminals for petty crimes, while they excluded “all but the most serious white female lawbreakers”. See: Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 155.

granted less frequently parole, reprieve, pardon, or commutation than white women, all of these being provisions providing for an earlier departure from the penitentiary. These provisions all required that women be informed of the relevant legal procedures, and be able to comply with them, which meant that white women might be more likely to meet these requirements. Indeed, white women were more educated on average: only 12 percent of them could not read nor write, whereas this proportion was of 36.4 percent among Black women⁸⁷⁰. More importantly, they all required that women be able to secure a recommendation from penitentiary officials and approval by higher authorities, which also meant that white women - who were treated better in the penitentiary - might be more likely to meet this second set of requirements. Altogether, they constitute an arsenal of “carrots and sticks” to control prisoners⁸⁷¹, who naturally have a strong desire to shorten their time in confinement⁸⁷².

⁸⁷⁰ Literacy score was only available for the periods 1901-1909 and 1920-1935. See Table J.1 in Appendix J.

⁸⁷¹ Time reductions have been employed to enforce discipline in Western prisons for a long time. See for instance: Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience*, 185–88.

⁸⁷² In the 1950s, several prisoners were released from Angola thanks to records falsified by prisoners working in the records office, allowing for premature releases with cuts from a few months to eight years. Nineteen records had been altered but only nine prisoners were actually released at the time of the discovery. Junior Lloyd Caudill, a white male prisoner recaptured later in Texas, stated that he had paid \$2,500 to a paid employee for his freedom, and was approached because it was known he would have the money. A record clerk, Henry Ducote, and an associate warden, R.F. Odom, were suspended. However, after a short investigation, during which they heard only a few witnesses among the staff, the West Feliciana grand jury declared there was no sufficient evidence to bring indictments against the prisoners or employees involved. Sources: “Suspend Associate Warden At Prison; Two More Who Bought Freedom Captured”, *Morning Advocate*, August 6, 1955; “Demand Probe of All Angola”, *State Times Advocate*, August 10, 1955; “Grand Jury to Go to Angola in Buy-Out Probe”, *Morning Advocate*, February 7, 1956; “Jury Declines Indictments”, *State Times Advocate*, February 8, 1956.

Table 6.8: Number and proportion of women admitted to LSP 1901-1935 according to motive of discharge, per race (life & death sentences included)

Exit scenarios applying (not mutually exclusive)	Black women (n=963)	% Black women's exits	white women (n=87)	% white women's exits	total women
Serving all their term	189	19.6%	16	18.4%	205
Awarded credits through the Good Time law	486	50.5%	29	33.3%	515
Granted parole (including parole violators)	165	17.1%	21	24.1%	186
Granted a reprieve	48	5.0%	10	11.5%	58
Granted a pardon	38	3.9%	15	17.2%	53
Granted a commutation of sentence	30	3.1%	9	10.3%	39
Other privileges:					
Granted a furlough (temporary leave, usually granted for medical or familial reasons)	12	1.2%	8	9.2%	20

Source: Angola Women's Database

The following tables present the terms served at the penitentiary as a proportion of the original sentence decreed by the parish court. Table 6.9 presents this information according to period, i.e. before and after the introduction of the indeterminate sentences, while table 6.10 presents the same information according to the nature of the conviction. It appears that, on average, Black women stayed in captivity for a larger proportion of their original sentence than white women did. This is a consequence of the situation stated above, i.e. that white women - especially the ones convicted of crimes against persons - benefitted disproportionately from parole, reprieve, commutation and pardon provisions, whereas Black women were more likely to finish their sentence the "standard" way, i.e. the original sentence minus whatever good time credits they were awarded. On average, Black and white women stayed for equivalent terms under the control of the state of Louisiana (782 days), despite longer original sentences given to white women (1,518 days compared to 1,325 days for Black women) because of their greater proportion of crimes against persons.

The impact of indeterminate sentencing appears to have been different for Black and white women. After 1916, Black women served a smaller percentage of their judicial maximum sentence than before, which is consistent with historian Nicole Rafter's findings in other states. Indeed, Rafter notes that the switch to indeterminate sentencing in New York (1901), Tennessee (1913) and Ohio (1913) did not lead to an increase in time actually served by women in these state prisons, but rather to a decline, although the decline toward lighter punishment was observed before this switch over the course of the late 19th century⁸⁷³. As expected, Black women convicted of crimes against persons received and served longer sentences than those convicted of crimes against property. Seven out of ten Black women convicted of crimes against persons received sentences shorter than eight years, and eight out of ten of them actually served less than four years. Seven out of ten Black women convicted of crimes against property received sentences shorter than two years, whereas eight out of ten of them actually served less than two years⁸⁷⁴.

Table 6.9: Average term served at LSP in percentage of original sentence, for all women admitted to LSP 1901-1935, per race

Period	Average of minimum original sentence done		Average of maximum original sentence done	
	Black women	white women	Black women	white women
From 1901 to 1915	79.0%	47.4%	79.0%	47.4%
After 1916	86.3%	72.5%	58.2%	50.6%
Total	83.6%	65.3%	66.1%	49.7%

Source: Angola Women's Database

⁸⁷³ Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 120.

⁸⁷⁴ For details, see figures in Appendix G.

Table 6.10: Average term served in percentage of original sentence, for women admitted to LSP 1901-1935 (death & life sentences excluded), per race and per category of crime⁸⁷⁵

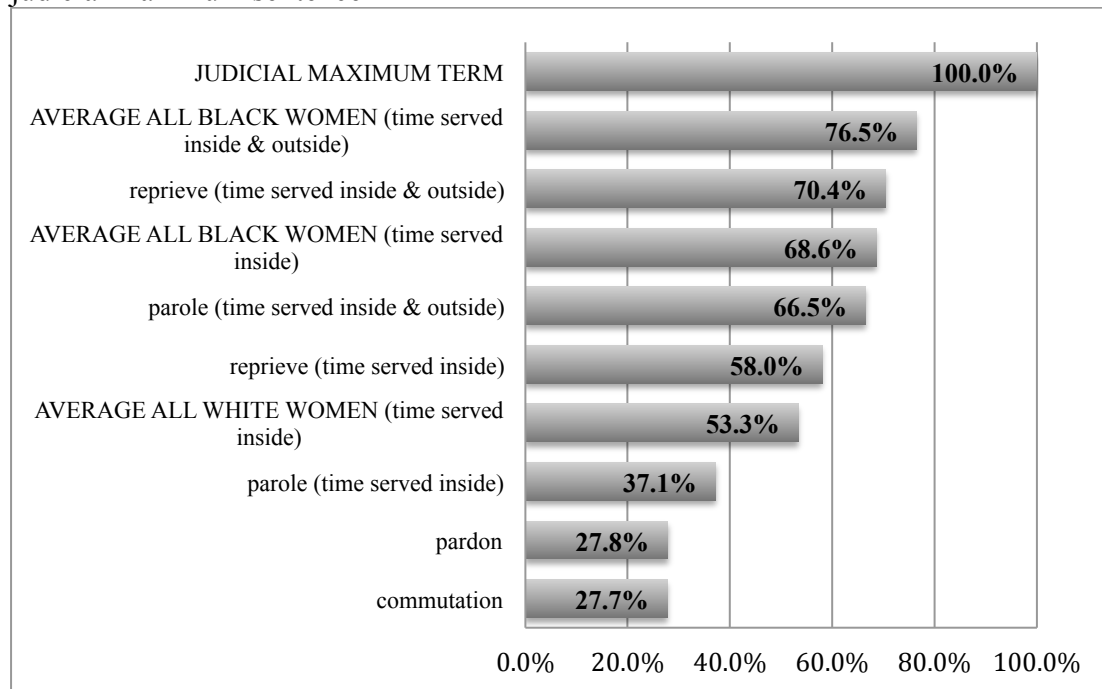
Alleged crime	Crimes against persons	Crimes against property	Total alleged crimes
Black women			
Number of Black women per category	520	341	897
Average time served (inside only) in % of original maximum sentence	62.2%	78.0%	68.6%
Average time served (inside and outside) in % of original maximum sentence	72.2%	82.7%	76.5%
White women			
Number of white women per category	26	37	83
Average time served (inside only) in % of original maximum sentence	31.7%	68.3%	53.3%
Average time served (inside and outside) in % of original maximum sentence	49.7%	83.1%	69.2%

Source: Angola Women's Database

As the following figure suggests, the different release mechanisms accounted for great variations in the portion of the term actually served by Black women. The following sections allow for a more detailed account of these various release mechanisms resulting from back-end discretion (in opposition to judicial decisions).

⁸⁷⁵ The expression “time served inside” means the portion of the sentence served at LSP, while “time served inside + outside” means that time served on parole, reprieve or furlough is counted in. Other categories of alleged crime were excluded for clarity purposes.

Figure 6.1: Term served by Black women according to release mechanism, by proportion of their judicial maximum sentence



Source: Angola Women's Database

6.2.1 Good Time Law

According to historian Mara Dodge, nineteenth century reformers saw pardons as arbitrary. They advocated for the establishment of good time as an alternative that would ensure more equity in early release practices. Reformers also realized that good time could constitute a way to maintain discipline. Subsequently, a lot of states instituted good time credits to reward prisoners deemed deserving⁸⁷⁶.

In Louisiana, this legal provision originated with Act 112, adopted by the 1890 Legislature, and was subsequently amended by Act 160 of 1902. As mentioned above, nearly half of the Black

⁸⁷⁶ Dodge, *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind*, chap. 4.

women admitted to LSP during the period 1901-1935 were released under the provisions of the Good Time Law. Among them, 52.6 percent had been convicted of crimes against persons, and 43.3 percent of crimes against property, which means that Black women convicted of crimes against property benefitted from the Good Time Law in higher proportions (since they represented only a third of the total Black female population). Excluding recidivists and life sentences, the Good Time Law allowed for the following reductions of sentences. For instance, in 1919, a total of twenty-three Black women were released from LSP, thirteen of them through the Good Time Law, including nine who lost a total of 490 days of time credits.

Table 6.11: Sentence reductions applicable for convictions of felony or misdemeanor, for terms equalling one year or more according to Act 112 (1890), section 2

First year	2 months
Second year	2 months
Third and fourth year	3 months each
Subsequent years	4 months each

Source: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans.

The 1902 amendment introduced the “double good time”, i.e. twice the allowance mentioned above for “highly meritorious actions or very exemplary conduct” such as “rescuing their fellow prisoners, or the officers, or guards, from peril ; standing by the officers in case of an outbreak ; doing gallant work in case of a fire ; rescuing a person who has fallen overboard and is about to drown, and similar acts”. For instance, during the great flood of 1927, sixty women, fifty-six of them Black, were rewarded for their contribution to the fight against the high waters. Prisoners assigned to some specific labor occupations were also eligible for double good time. At Baton Rouge ‘Walls’, those assignments were: hospital steward, foreman shoe shop, foreman clothing factory, baker, and prisoners’ cook, all except the last being held by white men. At Angola, white men also held most of those positions eligible for double good time: hospital steward, baker, prisoners’ cook, stableman, feed mill man, blacksmith, wheelwright, engineer drainage plant, fireman drainage plant. A decision of the Board of Control in March 1914 extended the privilege to the following positions: officers and guards’ cooks, officers’ waiters, guards’ waiters, head

gardener, assistant gardeners, washmen, dogmen, hogmen, and tailors, which made some Black men and women also eligible⁸⁷⁷.

This amendment was conceived to improve the morale of the prison⁸⁷⁸. According to C. Harrison Parker, President of the Board of Control, it presented many advantages:

it furnishes one of the very best systems ever devised for improving prison discipline and developing the principal of self-control among the prisoners. It is based upon the principle of making the individual work out his own salvation and earn a diminution of his sentence by his own efforts. It is susceptible of clear definition so that the most illiterate can understand and can be made to operate uniformly for all alike. It involves no favoritism, and is independent of any outside pull or political influence, or the importunities of friends and relatives because, being written in the rules and clearly defined, it is a part of the law, and is binding upon the Board⁸⁷⁹.

A few decades later, Warden Bazer considered that “the most effective” disciplinary measures was “the system of rewarding good conduct by credits on sentence”. He found this even more effective than corporal punishment, which he was (at least officially) trying to eliminate at Angola⁸⁸⁰. Indeed, at least in theory, prisoners could expect that their hard work and good behavior would shorten their sentence. Despite Parker’s claim that no favoritism applied to the calculation of Good Time, it is important to note here that labor assignments entitling individuals to double good time were subject to decisions made by penitentiary staff, for instance the women’s camp captain, and therefore risked being arbitrary.

In addition, prisoners could regress to an earlier status if they were disobedient, i.e. losing the number of days they had already earned towards an early release. Indeed, ninety-six of the Black women admitted over 1901-1935 were “fined” their good time (i.e. 19.8 percent of those discharged on the provisions of the Good Time Law). For instance, Willie W., whose discharge was scheduled for February 1910, saw her time credits withdrawn and her discharge postponed to

⁸⁷⁷ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. See pages 20-27.

⁸⁷⁸ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1902-1903, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. See page 9.

⁸⁷⁹ Source: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 25.

⁸⁸⁰ Report of the Department of Institutions of the State of Louisiana for the Year October 1940-1941, Call number 976.3 (360.61) L888r, LARC.

June 1910. This was probably due to her participation in a collective protest that had happened in December 1909, after which Camp D captain punished fifteen Black women including Willie W.⁸⁸¹. For reasons not stated in the records, one out of five women released through this mechanism over 1901-1935 saw their term at the penitentiary-plantation extended. They had lost all or part of their time credits, which were previously granted through their coerced labor and compliant attitude. Altogether, these women were “fined” 5,204 days (or an average of fifty-four days per person). This shows that the Good Time Law was both used as an incentive and a punishment in the management of prisoners. In addition, it is noteworthy that Black women convicted of crimes against property were in proportion more often “fined” some of their good time than those convicted of crimes against persons (respectively 27.5 percent and 15 percent). In several cases, it was observed in the records that women were actually fined their good time only a few weeks before they would have been eligible for an early release⁸⁸². To have this day postponed was most probably the most devastating thing that could happen to a woman who was aware of, and looking forward to, her upcoming release. Political prisoner Helen Bryan recalled that at Alderson: “Loss of good days created instant sympathy on our parts. We identified to a frightening degree with a girl to whom this happened because it meant that the enemy time had won an unexpected victory over her”⁸⁸³. These arbitrary practices obviously continued at LSP over the decades since in 1955, a prisoner who was only a few months into his sentence complained that all of his good time was taken away before it could even be earned. “The Attorney Answers” column of *The Angolite* mentioned his case, stating that: “the superintendent of the state prison has the sole authority to say who does and who does not get good time”⁸⁸⁴. This confirms the discretionary power that back-end instances such as penitentiary authorities had regarding the actual time served by their captives.

The experience of time was directly linked to the discipline regime within the penitentiary. As in other carceral institutions, control and surveillance at Angola extended to the intimate and mundane activities of daily life, scrutinizing behaviors that were normal in the outside world such

⁸⁸¹ Entry #4330, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection; Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection. See page 430.

⁸⁸² See for instance Entries #3531, #3710, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907, LSP Collection.

⁸⁸³ Bryan, *Inside*, 250.

⁸⁸⁴ *The Angolite*, December 31, 1955.

as “using bad language” or “misbehavior at dinner table” (an element that also speaks to the infantilization of women in the carceral context). This continuous scrutiny was probably stressful in itself for prisoners, and could result in physical punishment for Black women and a “black mark” on their disciplinary record, one that in turn impacted negatively their chances to obtain an earlier release through parole or otherwise. The application of prison rules dominated relationships between prisoners and guards, and shaped relationships among prisoners, who for instance were punished for fighting with each other⁸⁸⁵. This severe disciplinary regime was enforced despite the absence of written prison rules for most of the period, and therefore the arbitrary rules led to captains enjoying quasi-absolute power over their charges⁸⁸⁶. Infringements of rules appearing in the records fall in several categories: threats and impudence, disobedience, misbehavior, laziness, stealing, fighting, and trying to escape. Each occurrence could impact prisoners through the whole duration of their sentence unless their record was cleared by decision of the penitentiary authorities (for a more detailed analysis of discipline records, see chapter 8 section 8.3).

A total of 460 Black women were discharged from the institution under the provisions of the Good Time Law (i.e. 47.8 percent of the admissions for 1901-1935); the total is 441 when life and death sentences are excluded. The following table presents the ratio of the original sentences served by Black women who were released on Good Time, according to the type of crimes they were convicted of. For clarity purposes, only the two main categories of crimes are presented below, and life and death sentences were excluded from calculation. The Good Time provision meant that most of individuals receiving a sentence longer than a year would not serve in prison even the minimum sentence they had received in court. On average, Black women convicted of crimes against persons served less of their original judicial sentence than those convicted of crimes against property, although the discrepancy was not very significant.

⁸⁸⁵ Dobash, Dobash, and Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women*, 146–57.

⁸⁸⁶ Hamilton and Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary*, 55.

Table 6.12: Average time served at LSP by Black women admitted 1901-1935 and discharged on Good Time, in percentage of original sentence given by court, by crime category

Alleged crime	proportion of minimum sentence served	proportion of maximum sentence served
Crimes against persons (n=232) (life & death sentences excluded)	85.2%	69.6%
Crimes against property (n=191)	92.1%	76.1%
Total (n=441)	89.1%	72.4%

Source: Angola Women's Database

The following are examples of women discharged on the provisions of the Good Time Law. Carrie D., admitted with an eighteen-month sentence in March 1913, was discharged in June 1914 after serving eighty-five percent of her term. Records are silent about how Carrie D. obtained her time credits. Lodie H. admitted with a life sentence in March 1933, was discharged in March 1944 after serving eleven percent of her term (life sentences were coded as 100 years in the database). She had earned her time credits performing domestic work and maintenance tasks at the penitentiary, as detailed in chapter 7 (see section 7.3)⁸⁸⁷.

More than half of the women were discharged at an earlier date than the end of their (original) sentence, minus the good time for which they were eligible. In other words, the exit scenario for these women was other provisions such as a commutation or a pardon granted by the Governor, or a release from the penitentiary on parole or on reprieve, in which cases they were still on the books and had to report to penitentiary officials every month. The following sections explore these women's cases. In addition, a few individuals escaped without being recaptured or died during their incarceration (see chapter 5, sections 5.4 and 5.5). Transfers to the State Insane Asylum in Jackson were also a rare occurrence (only two women, one Black, the other white, among those admitted 1901-1935)⁸⁸⁸.

⁸⁸⁷ Entry #7621, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916; Entry #23341, Volume 37, no. 22701-23350, 1932-1933, LSP Collection.

⁸⁸⁸ Entry #19440, Volume 31, no. 18801-19450, 1929-1930; Entry #22688, Volume 36, no. 22051-22699, 1932, LSP Collection.

6.2.2 Pardons and commutations

As stated above, Black women received proportionately fewer commutations and pardons than their white counterparts. Only thirty-eight Black women among those admitted over the period 1901-1935 received a pardon (none of them before 1910); thirty-two of them had been convicted of crimes against persons (i.e. 84.2 percent), which usually entailed longer sentences. In comparison, fifteen white women received a pardon, including ten (or two thirds) who had been convicted of crimes against persons. As a result of the pardons obtained, Black women who were pardoned only served 27.8 percent of the duration of their original maximum sentence (including life sentences counted as 100 years), a much lower proportion than women who had only been credited with Good Time. The following case illustrates the disparity between these two release mechanisms.

In May 1929, Alice R. and Erdis B. were admitted together to LSP. They were convicted of manslaughter in Monroe, after being found guilty of the homicide of another Black woman, supposedly Alice's rival to obtain a man's favors. Incidentally, jealousy was a motive that newspapers invoked frequently to explain Black-on-Black violence. True or not, it served to support the stereotype of Black women's lewdness and promiscuity. The fact that Alice was married (to another man) made the case even more scandalous. *The Monroe News-Star* did not only express opinion on the women involved in the case, but also ridiculed those attending the trial. In fact, *The Monroe News-Star* published one article on the trial and another one exclusively on its audience the same day. The case attracted the attention of the African American community and "an unusual amount of interest". Five hundred were said to be in the second floor of the Monroe court house, which was the segregated Black section. Others were occupying benches on the first floor left empty probably because whites did not care to attend the trial of Black women accused of killing "one of their race". "Many [African Americans] were unable to find seats and had to remain outside the court room". Those who had found a seat stayed there during lunch time, and the newspaper went as far as commenting that "many went without lunch, while others had been shrewd enough to bring sandwiches and fruit with them". The purpose of this article was according to its author "to satisfy the curiosity of those persons who were and

probably still are cook-less and maid-less”. Written for a white audience, it served to undermine African Americans’ legitimate interest in the justice process. *The Monroe News-Star* insisted on the fact that many in attendance were cooks or maids, positions they occupied because racial discrimination restricted their access to better jobs. The subtext was that these persons should have been toiling in white homes rather than sitting in the court room. By doing so, the newspaper suggested that their role in society was to serve whites rather than making sure that white justice served the interests of their community. One could even conclude that Alice and Erdis would not have been in trouble with justice if they had been working harder as domestic laborers, which they both were prior to their incarceration. At their admission, Alice was 27 and Erdis was 24 years old. The sentence they had to serve was six to nine years. Alice was discharged from LSP in May 1933 through the provisions of the Good Time law after she had completed 45 percent of her maximum sentence. As a cook for Camp D Captain, she was a trusty, a status allowing her to be credited with double good time. However, as a result of her proximity with Captain Jesse M. Willis, she was also probably more likely than other prisoners to get punished for disciplinary infractions. This was the case in November 1929, only three months after she had started cooking for him and his family (i.e. Mrs. Leola Willis, Camp D matron, and their two teenager children). She was then “dropped from the [parole] eligibility list” for “disobedience”. Later during her incarceration, she filed application for pardons at least twice, but was unsuccessful in securing a recommendation from LSP officials. Most probably, it was because of her disciplinary record. She was found “drunk” in December 1931 and was hit twenty five times by Captain T.J. Drewett, in charge of the receiving station at the “Walls”. Alice had been transferred at the Baton Rouge facilities at the beginning of 1931 to serve as a cook for Mr. Phillips, most probably C.T. Phillips, the penitentiary auditor, who resided in Baton Rouge. Her last occupation at LSP was at Angola’s laundry, where she was probably transferred at the closing of the “Walls” early 1932. Conversely, Erdis was discharged in November 1932, i.e. six months before Alice, following the full pardon Governor O.K. Allen granted her. She was also at the service of a camp captain (presumably Willis, although the record does not specify). There, she worked as a “waiter” for the entire duration of her term. Therefore she was also a trusty. Her disciplinary record shows no infringement to prison rules. Her apparent compliance, in contrast

with Alice's infractions, might be the factor making the difference in Erdis' ability to secure a pardon whereas it was denied to Alice⁸⁸⁹.

In addition to the thirty-eight Black women who were pardoned, a total of thirty Black women's sentences were commuted. Conversely, nine white women obtained commutation of their sentences. Like for pardons, women convicted of crimes against persons represented the overwhelming majority of commutations for both groups (respectively 86.7 and 55.6 percent). Commutations reduced time served for these Black women to 27.7 percent of the duration of their original maximum sentence (including life sentences counted as 100 years), again a much lower proportion than women who had only been credited with Good Time.

As the following case demonstrates, sentences commutations and pardons were sometimes ways to acknowledge that lower courts had rendered a conviction either unjustified or too severe, and to redress justice. Eliza P. admitted with a life sentence in May 1912, was discharged in October 1913 when she obtained a full pardon, after serving one percent of her term (life sentences were coded as 100 years). According to the press, the Board who recommended her pardon to the Governor "probably corrected a direct miscarriage of justice". Pleading guilty to her husband's murder because she found herself in the courtroom in front of a "big crowd," and without her attorney who "was too drunk to take care of the case", she had been sentenced to life. However, after the conviction, "certain persons" informed the parish judge that, before she committed the homicide, her husband had treated her brutally, and both the judge and the prosecutor (i.e. the parish district attorney) had intervened directly to advocate for her pardon, which was a rare acknowledgement of Black women's self-defence in the context of domestic violence⁸⁹⁰. Her case exemplifies how public support could help women securing a pardon, and how the parish instances were instrumental in obtaining a recommendation from the Pardon Board.

⁸⁸⁹ Entries #18859, #18860, Volume 31, no. 18801-19450, 1929-1930, LSP Collection; "Regular Venire Exhausted; More Talesmen Called", *The Monroe News-Star*, May 10, 1929; "You're your Cook Missing? May Be at Court House", *The Monroe News-Star*, May 10, 1929; "Manslaughter Verdict Given by Jury Here", *The Monroe News-Star*, May 11, 1929; "Announcements", *The Monroe News-Star*, September 19, 1931; "Announcements", *The Monroe News-Star*, November 21, 1932; U.S. Census, 1930.

⁸⁹⁰ Entry #7072, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916, LSP Collection; "Three Convicts Are Recommended For Full Pardon", *The Times-Democrat*, October 2, 1913.

To secure a full pardon or a sentence commutation, an individual had to convince the Pardon Board to intercede in her favor. Formulating an appeal gave women a chance to exercise their agency by crafting their own narrative of the crime and of their own trajectory⁸⁹¹. Bernice H. claimed in her petition that she was in “destitute circumstances” when she committed the crime of “receiving stolen goods”. Gertrude J. was among the rare women who dared to claim their innocence in their clemency application. Oftentimes, women who wrote pardon letters adopted a posture of humility and supplication by invoking their families’ need and their own role as caregivers, as suggested by the following examples from the late 1950s and early 1960s. In her petition, Gertrude J. mentioned her 14-year-old daughter “who badly needs her”. Likewise, Lucy M., a widow following her husband’s homicide and mother of seven children “in need of her as they are in the homes of different families” stated: “I want to return and gather my children and rear them properly in order that they may not fall into the same disgrace I have fallen”. Rita R. coaxed the Board by claiming that one of her daughters was “in a terrible nervous condition and needs the presence of her mother to obtain the return of her health and reason”. Bernice H. invoked her “large family who needs her desperately at home” and Mildred S.P. her “four minor children without care” since her husband’s death subsequent to her conviction. In contrast, white women, or the individuals who supported their clemency application, referred more to their own hardship in prison than the fate of their children outside. The chaplains who advocated for Leola B. stated that “she is paying emotionally for her crime” whereas Betty T., a white woman convicted of marijuana possession, argued that others had received shorter sentences for the same crime⁸⁹².

Some other Black women coaxed the Board rather with their compliant behavior during incarceration: “I have done everything in my power to be a model prisoner and have tried to the best of my ability to perform all work assignments with graciousness that have been given to me” wrote Beulah Mae J., suggesting that institutional expectations might have been superior to what she was humanly capable of providing. In her petition, Zolla P. stated that she had been “a model prisoner” and that “on her return to civilian life”, she would “conduct herself as a model person

⁸⁹¹ Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*.

⁸⁹² Petitions, Boxes 1, 8, 9, 13, 15, 21, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. All cases in this collection are for women and men who obtained either a pardon or a sentence commutation.

[..] behave herself and no longer give authorities any trouble”. In contrast, the Board stated white prisoner Betty T. had a good record and recommended her commutation, choosing to ignore several infractions appearing in her discipline record, including an instance where she had consumed drugs, even though she had precisely been convicted of marijuana possession⁸⁹³.

White support also proved instrumental for Black women desirous of obtaining a pardon or commutation. Despite serving her third penitentiary term, a fact that placed her at a disadvantage, and despite a disciplinary record indicating that she had spent ten days in isolation during her first year at LSP for “practicing Voo-Doo and Black Magic for a price”, Mary H. managed to secure support from several matrons and correctional officers, in addition to the chaplain and the chief security officer. In July 1959, at age seventy-one, she finally obtained a commutation to ten years and six months, after three failed attempts over the previous years. She obtained a discharge from Angola the following July. Despite her old age, Mary H. stated in her petition that she had been “promised gainful employment in the home of a white family” upon her release and wished to “spend the last remaining years of my life a free member of society and my community”. A former white employer supported another Black woman’s application with a letter stating that Marie H. “seemed to be a very good worker” and that he “never heard of her being in any trouble before this occasion that sent her to Angola”⁸⁹⁴. Mary H. and Marie H. exemplify how Black women were not considered as deserving freedom unless they could prove their ongoing economic utility as a worker.

In contrast, white women most often referred in their applications to the need to have their reputation restored, and seldom to their re-entry as workers. Maude N., who came from a “prominent family in Southwestern Louisiana”, pled guilty to a theft of \$2,300 from her employer, the city of Jennings, and was sentenced to two years at LSP, but was placed on probation for four years. Arguing she had psychiatric disorders that made her commit her crime and that she would start a new life with her husband and children in Mississippi where she would not tarnish her family’s image, her petition for clemency nonetheless met the opposition of the

⁸⁹³ Petitions, Boxes 15, 19, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁸⁹⁴ Petitions, Boxes 7, 17, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

district attorney and the parish judge. Nevertheless, Governor Earl K. Long granted her a full pardon only six months after her conviction. Effie W., a white clothes maker in her sixties, pled guilty to procuring an abortion. Acknowledging the seriousness of her crime in her petition, she claimed that it had “already cost her all of her worldly possessions and caused her untold suffering, mental pain and anguish of such nature that is inconceivable to describe in this petition”. Granted a parole after eleven months into her three-year sentence, she moved to Texas to live with one of her sons. To alleviate her “mortification and shame”, she asked that her name be cleared before dying. Governor Long satisfied her wish by granting her a full pardon⁸⁹⁵.

The sentencing judge had to agree to any pardons and commutations before the Board’s recommendations could be submitted to the Louisiana Governor, who pronounced the final decision. Judge John R. McIntosh from the Seventh District court was reluctant to agree to the pardon of two prisoners: “I do not care to oppose the policy of the Board but personally I could not give my approval and would suggest that these parties be warned to appear again in Richland Parish when pardoned”⁸⁹⁶. Prosecutors could also get involved in the pardon and commutation procedures, and sometimes opposed early releases on behalf of victims or their families⁸⁹⁷.

Because of these obstacles, not all clemency appeals brought about a pardon or a sentence commutation. For some women, it took several attempts spaced out over several years to earn freedom. Nevertheless, the appeal process gave them hope, which was - according to an anonymous prisoner who spoke on behalf of Angola’s captives - “our reason for living”. Reacting to the possibility of a more restrictive application process and signing “ONE OF THE 2500”, this individual affirmed: “Our standards – mental, physical and moral – are directly proportional to the amount of hope we possess. To destroy hope is to destroy ideals, incentive and morale”⁸⁹⁸. Confronted with an overload of applications to examine at each of its meetings,

⁸⁹⁵ Petitions, Boxes 3, 4, Collection P1991- 044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁸⁹⁶ John R. McIntosh to A. V. Coco, 5 September 1917, Box 1, Collection P1978-139, Attorney General Correspondence 1916-1917, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁸⁹⁷ District Attorney of the 18th Judicial District to the Attorney General, 26 February 1917; Attorney General to District Attorney of the 18th Judicial District, 27 February 1917, Box 1, Collection P1978-139, Attorney General Correspondence 1916-1917, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁸⁹⁸ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 33, October 31, 1953.

the Board considered restricting the eligibility of the applicants. Several solutions were put on the table: to prevent new prisoners from applying, or to impose a once-a-year limit on clemency applications. In reaction, *The Angolite* published an emotional editorial entitled “Don’t Sell Us Short on Hope”, which contained an unsubtle warning to the penitentiary officials about potential prisoners’ revolts:

they want you who have just been received in the LSP with a three-year sentence – after having spent two years in a parish jail awaiting trial and late appealing your case, not to ask for freedom. Wait awhile. They ask you – with a wife and five hungry children – to settle down and do your time like a good little convict [...] don’t sell us short; don’t limit or take away our only hope. For to [sic] many of us, hope is our only reason for living. [...] It is axiomatic that hope and high-morale go hand in hand. It also is axiomatic that despair should birth unrest and trouble⁸⁹⁹.

Despite the fact that clemency applications meant begging for mercy from State officials, they also “helped to restore some sense of personal agency, often lost after a trial and imprisonment” by engaging women in discussion of the legalities of their own cause⁹⁰⁰. Over the decades, new provisions were implemented, such as parole and reprieve (discussed below), which thereby further complicated the arsenal of “carrots and sticks” and, in turn offered prisoners new reasons to hope for their early release from the penitentiary-plantation, and new incentives to comply with penitentiary rules.

6.2.3 Paroles and reprieves

The first parole law in Louisiana was introduced in 1914 whereas reprieve - a penitentiary prerogative rather than a procedure prescribed by legislation - was established in 1932. Under the provisions of either parole or reprieve, a prisoner released from Angola had to report every month to penitentiary authorities (sometimes through a parish sheriff); otherwise they would be considered a parole violator and brought back to the penitentiary-plantation for the remainder of

⁸⁹⁹ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 31, October 24, 1953.

⁹⁰⁰ Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West*, 208.

their sentence (on a total of 186 parolees, only three women were considered parole violators over the period). Until their final discharge by penitentiary authorities, these prisoners were not free. According to one of Angola's parole officers: "Parole is not clemency. It is just another method for the man to serve the remaining portion of his sentence in the free world"⁹⁰¹.

In 1914, the State Legislature adopted Act 149, which was amended several times subsequently during Jim Crow⁹⁰². During the first year and a half of its existence, the Louisiana parole law benefited a total of 197 state prisoners (less than ten percent of the penitentiary population), who were mostly white prisoners. Indeed, 124 white men and four white women were paroled from July 1914 to December 31, 1915, while only sixty-one Black men and eight Black women were paroled. Despite the fact that "life prisoners were made subject to parole after service of five years, and all prisoners included in the act were made eligible at the end of one year", it seems that Black prisoners could not have the same access to the procedures. The application for parole required not only filling out a form, but also "a recommendation or endorsement of a first friend". In addition to securing the collaboration of the camp captain, who was supposed to assist prisoners who could not read and write, parole applicants had to solicit and secure support for their application in the outside world. This requirement most probably necessitated a white male employer as a "first friend" to assess that, after being paroled, the person would be a productive citizen placed under the surveillance of a patronizing boss, which might have been harder to secure for Black prisoners:

It is to be regretted that in the case o[f] negroes, which compose about 80 per cent of the prison population, they are not able, in many cases, to secure the indorsement [sic] of a first friend, and this is particularly true in the case with the younger ones, who ought to be the most deserving of this kind of paternal care after release from prison⁹⁰³.

Following the adoption of indeterminate sentencing, Act 125 of 1916 amended the parole law, in order for prisoners with indeterminate sentences to be able to apply when their minimum sentence was done. They would stay under parole supervision until the expiration of their

⁹⁰¹ Picou's interview, 1944 Hearings, 43.

⁹⁰² Hyde, "Developments in Correctional Services for Adult Felony Offenders in Louisiana."

⁹⁰³ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quotes on pages 44, 46.

maximum sentence, which would mean that for years they were “doing time in the outside world”.

Parole was another correctional innovation of the Progressive Era, which “enhanced the Progressive design for behavioral change, since convicts served at least a portion of their sentence and had to pass a thorough examination before supervised release from the penitentiary”. American reformers imported parole methods used in England, Ireland, and Australia into the United States during the 1870s⁹⁰⁴. Before 1900, only twenty states had some sort of provisions regarding parole, whereas in 1922, their numbers had reached forty-four. By 1936, forty-six states authorized the use of parole, which made up more than four-fifths of releases within fifteen of these states. The federal government enacted a formal parole system in 1901. In the 1910s, it was calculated that: “The actual saving to the U.S. on the account of paroled prisoners, computed upon the basis of the average individual cost of maintaining prisoners in the [federal] penitentiary, was \$14,262.52”. This made parole not only “of great benefit for those paroled”, but also for the federal government⁹⁰⁵. By 1923, sixty percent of federal prisoners left federal institutions on parole. According to historian Alex Tepperman, states adopted parole laws that allowed them to cope with increasingly crowded carceral institutions, and “the federal prison system was especially concerned about space, given that the Department of Justice only controlled three penitentiaries prior to the interwar period”. Despite parole being contested both by public opinion and law enforcement, “correctional systems would employ unpopular means of easing prison populations or decreasing expenses out of sheer necessity”. Indeed, according to a Gallup poll, in 1934, eighty-two percent of adults in the country believed “parole should be more strict and granted less frequently”⁹⁰⁶. Police forces also protested parole because of their reluctance to see undesirable individuals coming back to their communities too quickly⁹⁰⁷.

⁹⁰⁴ Johnson, *The Penitentiaries in Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah from 1900 to 1980*, 15.

⁹⁰⁵ Good Words, Special Christmas and New Year Number, December 1913-January 1914, Southern Labor Archives periodical collection, Box 05271, Special Collections, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

⁹⁰⁶ Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows”, 47–48, 68–69.

⁹⁰⁷ Johnson, *The Penitentiaries in Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah from 1900 to 1980*, 15.

In the early 1930s, the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement documented the extent of parole across the country. The commission, headed by former attorney general George Wickersham and known as the Wickersham Commission, found out that some states “pursued the policy of refusing nearly all application for parole” while others “released everybody at the earliest moment possible”. Louisiana was among the states requiring that prisoners be released on parole after the expiration of their minimum sentence. The Pelican state also required that parolees be discharged from institutional supervision only after the expiration of their maximum sentence⁹⁰⁸. According to historian Maria Dodge, gender influenced greatly parole practices:

Wickersham committee members failed to analyze parole boards’ attitudes towards female offenders. Nor did they speculate how such elusive factors as appearance and character were interpreted when applied to women. The questions about ‘morality’ - such as those involving promiscuity, public drinking, having illegitimate children, common-law marriages, and interracial relationships - that permeated women’s parole hearings were entirely missing from men’s examinations [...] A woman whom local authorities and community members perceived as immoral had less chance of ‘making good’ on parole than did a man. Indeed, whatever her previous reputation, a woman branded with the label ‘ex-convict’ faced enormous social prejudices. Closely supervised after her release, she risked return to prison for any transgressions of the norms of proper femininity⁹⁰⁹.

Historian Cheryl Hicks has demonstrated that race also influenced the assumptions about parolees; because of their general distrust of Blacks, New York prison authorities were reluctant to grant parole to African American women. Statistics produced for this research indicate that this situation also prevailed in Louisiana (see below). When granted parole, Black women were seldom sent to do factory work unlike white women⁹¹⁰. For many Black women prisoners, parole rather meant domestic service for white families (as in the fictional case of the character Sofia in Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple*)⁹¹¹. Such was the case for Fannie P.M. and Inez W., both Angola prisoners. Sentenced in 1943 when she was only 18 years old, Fannie P.M. was a second termier at Angola, i.e. “an habitual criminal” under Act 45 of 1942, which meant she got a harsher

⁹⁰⁸ U.S. National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (Wickersham Commission), *Report on Penal Institutions, Probation and Parole*, 133, 301.

⁹⁰⁹ Dodge, *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind*, 198.

⁹¹⁰ Hicks, *Talk with You like a Woman*, chap. 8.

⁹¹¹ Walker, *The Color Purple*.

penitentiary sentence the second time, even though her first conviction (beginning at an unknown date) should have led her to a girls' reformatory rather than Angola. She obtained parole in August 1950, seven years and four months into her twenty-year sentence. Beginning in January 1956, she had been working in the home of the Charles Kent family in Fluker, La. Mrs. Kent testified in June 1959 that she had "been loyal, completely honest, dependable and faithful in her duties" and that she had "displayed remarkable patience" with the four Kent children. Wishing to offer a permanent position to the Black woman, Mrs. Kent insisted in her support of Fannie's pardon application that: "In comparison with others of her race Fannie Mazen is far above average if for no other reason because of her dependability". Writing to the parish court on behalf of his good friends, Mr. and Mrs. Kent, an attorney solicited the judge's recommendation for the pardon, which might have reinforced the validity of the application and helped Fannie to finally obtain her full pardon from Governor Jimmy Davis in December 1960. From the time of her second conviction, she had spent seventeen years under state surveillance, almost half of her life. As for Inez W., sentenced in June 1954, she was paroled in December 1958 after four years and five months into her twelve-year-sentence. Like Fannie P.M., this was her second attempt to obtain parole. In her case, it was probably her bad disciplinary record that caused her to stay longer at Angola: she had "disobeyed orders" twice, "waved" twice to a male prisoner and "thrown contraband to [an] inmate guard", which led her to spend four "indefinite" periods of time in isolation and to lose some of her good time. Since her departure from Angola, she had been "steadily employed" as a housekeeper by Mrs. George Lynne in Metairie, La., and it was Mrs. Lynne who bought on her behalf the newspaper advertisement required by law for her pardon application. After at least one failed attempt in 1960, she obtained her full pardon from Governor Davis in December 1962, instead of continuing to serve on parole until July 1966⁹¹².

Sources do not reveal what working conditions Fannie P.M., Inez W. and other Black women paroled from Angola met at their white employers' homes. Did they get justly paid for their work under parole, or were their white domestic managers not required to provide wages, as it was the case in Georgia where, according to historian Sarah Haley, "most black women on parole were paid only once in a while"? Certainly, they were equally "subject to constant surveillance and the

⁹¹² Petitions, Boxes 16, 21, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

threat of return to the prison camp for any transgression” while “private individuals, many of whom were now white women, continued to serve as police and warders”. African American women’s capacity to resist economic or sexual exploitation in the context of domestic labor and parole was compromised by the constant risk of being sent back to the penitentiary for the remainder of their sentences as a result of a bad report from their white employers. In addition, it might have been hard for them to defy white authority when they needed their white bosses to support their application for commutation or pardon. Indeed, “white middleclass women and men wrote to prison authorities asserting their right to ‘have’ black women’s domestic labor and bodies but framed their requests as liberal efforts to liberate them from prison and to care for them”⁹¹³. In Northern states, African American women were also often paroled to white families to perform housework. For young Black women paroled from Bedford reformatory, “the white household was an extension of the prison”. Most of them complained about the arduousness of the labor; some even preferred the reformatory to the white home they were toiling in during their parole and voluntarily returned to Bedford⁹¹⁴. Some Northern Black women, including native Southerners who were part of the Great Migration, were even sent to the South to work on parole for white southern families whom Bedford authorities assumed knew better how to deal with Black people, i.e. how to subjugate them to their authority⁹¹⁵. The objectives for Angola, Bedford and other prisons were “THE PROTECTION OF SOCIETY IN GENERAL” and that the parolee could “take his [or her] place in civil life in such way that he [or she] will not get into trouble again”⁹¹⁶.

In 1944, three paroled prisoners were found working on a big dairy farm in up-State Louisiana “ten to fourteen hours a day for 75 cents” where they were mistreated. According to the press, almost two hundred parolees, most of them Black men, were working on Louisiana plantations for ridiculous wages, and the State was forced to look into their cases⁹¹⁷. As early as 1917, penitentiary manager Henry Fuqua had warned the legislature about the abuse that could

⁹¹³ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 158, 182.

⁹¹⁴ Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 267, 406.

⁹¹⁵ Hicks, *Talk with You like a Woman*, chap. 8.

⁹¹⁶ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 23. Capitals in warden’s text.

⁹¹⁷ “The Deep South”, *The New York Times*, December 24, 1944.

potentially result from the legal requirement of a “best friend” (or “first friend”) endorsing parole:

Some farmers and other employers of labor have learned it is possible to obtain good laborers from among the convicts at the state farm. They make applications for parole of the man they want and if the parole board thinks the convict worthy of parole the parole is granted. The employers sign as best friend and the prisoner is released to them. The result of this depends entirely upon the character of the employer. If he is a square-minded man the paroled convict may profit by the arrangement. But if the employer chooses he may practically establish a form of peonage by paying the paroled man but a small wage and threatening to return him to the state farm if he attempts to leave him or shirk his work. [...] In fact, a number of such paroled prisoners have requested they be taken back on the farm⁹¹⁸.

As the 1944 story demonstrates, at least a number of parolees were excessively vulnerable to employers who took advantage of their precarious position between freedom and unfreedom to impose long hours, low wages and brutal treatment. In January 1957, former Governor Earl K. Long admitted that Black male prisoners “were given special parole to work on [his own] farm”, a practice which he defended⁹¹⁹. One of the men laboring on Long’s farm in Winnfield had complained that Long “had failed to honor a wage agreement” that a State Representative had presented him before parole and, that he was “requiring seven days work a week”⁹²⁰. In addition, Long claimed that: “any farmer could get convicts paroled to him” and insisted that “more farmers in Louisiana should help out the state parole program by providing jobs to parolees”⁹²¹.

The same logic had prevailed in the case of reprieves, another mechanism allowing for the quick release of prisoners. On discharge, the person would be given “a certificate showing that he has a right to be free and will be required to notify the general offices every month of his whereabouts”. Reprieves were subject to cancellation the same way than paroled individuals could be returned to the penitentiary for violation of parole. The main difference in the

⁹¹⁸ “‘Prisoners’ Parole to ‘Best Friend’ Leads to Peonage’”, *The Times-Picayune*, November 26, 1917.

⁹¹⁹ “State, Prison Labor Used on Gov. Long’s Farm”, *Crusader*, February 1, 1957.

⁹²⁰ “Long Is Target of Complaint”, “Gov. Long’s Farm Help”, *The Times-Picayune*, January 19, 1957. See also “Paroled Convicts Used by Long on Winnfield Farm”, *Morning Advocate*, January 19, 1957; “Long Denies Wrongdoing in Use of Parolees”, *State Times Advocate*, January 22, 1957.

⁹²¹ “State, Prison Labor Used on Gov. Long’s Farm”, *Crusader*, February 1, 1957; “Long Defends Use of Convict Parole at His Winnfield Farm”, *Morning Advocate*, January 23, 1957.

mechanism of reprieve was that no ‘best friend’ was required for the reprieve⁹²². Nevertheless, this expedited process was instrumental in answering the needs of local employers, sometimes before the date of eligibility for parole, and did not require the intervention of the Board nor approval from parish judges and prosecutors. In January 1936, Governor Oscar K. Allen granted an indefinite reprieve to Para Lee B. who had been admitted for a one-to-two-year sentence in March 1935. In his recommendation to Allen, General manager Himes stated that “Mr. R.E. Crownover, Route 4, Minden, La., who employs this subject’s mother and sister, has a place for her to farm this year” and that this 20-year-old Black woman’s case came “within the requirements for farm reprieves, such as this office facilitates at this season of the year”. Until her final discharge from LSP six months later, she would be under the control of her Minden employer⁹²³.

This young woman was not the only farm laborer to be returned to her employer (or to another plantation) not only before the end of her sentence, but also in time for the agricultural season:

It has been a policy of this office to recommend early in the year reprieves for farm laborers who qualify by the usual standards of reprieve except in that they may be a few weeks short of the one-third rule. It is deemed better public policy to let them get started with their crops in January than to send them home later in the year handicapped by a late start⁹²⁴.

Reprieves became a tool to answer white employers’ needs, particularly those involved in farming. However, it was probably the overcrowding of the penitentiary facilities that prompted General Manager Himes to start the practice of reprieves in 1931 with Governor Huey P. Long’s approval. Indeed, the following year, Himes complained that within a four-year period, the state carceral population had doubled from 1,600 to 3,200. Himes did not attribute this sharp increase to a crime wave but, rather, to “abuses” by parish courts. In the press, Himes explicitly accused the parishes of trying to avoid the cost of local jail sentences by sending men and women to LSP for “as short as 30 or 60 days sentences” as well as making up “charges so that penitentiary sentences could be imposed” and argued that these practices were detrimental to people who

⁹²² “Allen Reprieves 327 Pen Inmates; 209 Are Negroes”, *Morning Advocate*, September 28, 1932.

⁹²³ R.L. Himes to O.K. Allen, 13 January 1936, Pardon record #479, volume 12, 1934-1936, Collection P1975-021, Pardons 1892-1940, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁹²⁴ R.L. Himes to O.K. Allen, 8 January 1936, Pardon record #475, volume 12, 1934-1936, Collection P1975-021, Pardons 1892-1940, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

would be branded as felons “for the simplest kind of crimes, which ordinarily would be classed as mere human mistakes”⁹²⁵. It was also detrimental to the penitentiary management who had to adjust to a rapid flux of incoming and outgoing prisoners, and to deal with overcrowded facilities.

On September 27, 1932, Governor Oscar K. Allen signed reprieves for 327 penitentiary prisoners, including 209 Black prisoners. This was the first “group reprieve” following individual reprieves granted in 1931 and earlier in 1932, including to four women, three of them Black. The list signed by Allen was comprised of “prisoners whose sentences are two years or under and who have served a sufficient percentage of their terms to bring them well within the principle of parole” as well as prisoners scheduled to be discharged the following month⁹²⁶. Six women, including five African Americans, were on this first list, their final discharge being from three weeks to six months distant. Only two days later, Allen signed another 358 reprieves; this second list included recidivists owing time on previous sentences, parole violators, and people who had received sentences of less than 8 years⁹²⁷. This time, ten women had made it on the list, eight of them African Americans, one of them a second term at Angola. Without this exceptional reprieve, some of them could have stayed at Angola as long as another two years before their final discharge. Allen signed a third list of reprieves on November 3, 1932, which included three women, two of them African Americans, and a fourth list on March 28, 1933, which included three African American women⁹²⁸. As a result, the size of the women’s camp decreased from eighty-five Black women to seventy-five in six months (and from ten to seven white women); however, at the end of 1933, those previous levels were reached again, more likely bringing back the same concerns for overcrowding.

The case of Rosa H. who appeared on the second list of reprieves illustrates the surprising generosity of penitentiary officials. Not only had Rosa H. arrived at LSP with five commitments with consecutive sentences (cumulating in a total of six years minimum to seven years and eight months maximum), but she had also managed to escape from Angola on September 11, 1926,

⁹²⁵ “Steps Are Taken to Reduce Number of Pen Prisoners”, *State Times Advocate*, September 21, 1932.

⁹²⁶ “Allen Reprieves 327 Pen Inmates; 209 Are Negroes”, *Morning Advocate*, September 28, 1932.

⁹²⁷ “358 Additional Prisoners Are to Be Released”, *Morning Advocate*, September 30, 1932.

⁹²⁸ The orders signed by O.K. Allen for group reprieves can be found in: volume 11, 1932-1934, Collection P1975-021, Pardons 1892-1940, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

after a previous failed attempt two months prior when she had been recaptured the next day. Arrested and convicted of another larceny, she was admitted again to LSP on November 5, 1926, for a new sentence of six to eight months, adding to the seven years, two months, and twenty-three days she owed on her previous sentences. After all, Rosa H. was only accused of petty larcenies, all for objects of small value. However, the reprieve lists also comprised individuals convicted of crimes against persons, including Elizabeth K. Elizabeth K. was a Black woman serving a life sentence for shooting - in her New Orleans community of Hollygrove - another Black woman who died from gunshot wounds. She was 55-years-old when she left Angola and had been in charge of the chicken coop at Camp D. This assignment suggests that she might not have been able to perform more arduous work for the state, which was possibly the motive for her release⁹²⁹.

Himes's decision (endorsed by the Governor) to discharge "quite a few [prisoners convicted] for manslaughter" did not go unnoticed. He was particularly criticized because in the public view, his decision meant that he considered that "the taking of human life is classed as a relatively trivial matter". It was also perceived that, by granting reprieves after the execution of the sentence, he was claiming the right to be "above the law", i.e. to go against the judge's decree⁹³⁰. The criticism went so far as to inspire the West Feliciana parish grand jury to recommend the impeachment of the officials responsible for the reprieve, which they termed: "an unwarranted and unprecedented action on the part of the governor of this state and the general manager of the penitentiary" who took upon themselves the "wholesale-liberating of convicts without one line of law and justification". In addition, and to counter-attack Himes's humanitarian discourse, the grand jury deplored that the prisoners were "turned loose [...] many of them in their convicts' garb without so much as a thin dime to assist them on their way to their respective homes"⁹³¹. Released without a warning, they were not able to "have sent home for clothing and money". Instead:

⁹²⁹ Supreme Court of Louisiana, Docket 27,537, Collection P1986-146, Louisiana Supreme Court Records 1922-, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

⁹³⁰ "Above the Law", *The Times-Picayune*, October 1, 1932.

⁹³¹ "West Feliciana Grand Jury Hits Reprieves at Pen", *State Times Advocate*, October 6, 1932. Criticisms against reprieves continued. In 1934, the Orleans Parish District Attorney contested this practice arguing that it brought dangerous individuals back into society. "Charges Governor With Illegal Use of Reprieve Plan", *State Times Advocate*, June 7, 1934.

They were given their freedom, and that was all. They were left at the big gate to shift for themselves. Were not given any money and were not given citizens clothes. Most of the men seemed to have been released with only the clothes they wore during their incarceration, and several of them were wearing stripes⁹³².

We have no way of knowing the conditions in which Black women were released from LSP either on parole or on reprieve. Most probably made do, in view of the fact that not much could be worse than serving time at Angola. Among the 165 Black women who were paroled, only three returned as parole violators, the others managing to “stay out of trouble” until their final discharge from the penitentiary. Twenty-one white women were paroled and only one came back to LSP voluntarily after almost two years on parole⁹³³. No woman granted an indefinite reprieve came back to LSP before her final discharge.

On average, Black women paroled served only 37.1 percent of their maximum original sentence at LSP. However, when adding the time served on parole as time served under state control (even when control was in fact delegated to white private employers), then the average jumps to 66.5 percent (for white women, the average is 32.3 percent served at LSP, and 61.4 percent served both at LSP and on parole). These figures are higher for reprieves (in particular because there were short-term reprieves and not only indefinite reprieves): 58 percent of the maximum original sentence was served at LSP and a total of 70.4 percent was served combining time at the penitentiary and time on reprieve.

Black women were less likely to be paroled, granted a reprieve or to benefit from another back-end mechanism allowing for an earlier release. Consequently, on average, they served a larger proportion of their original sentence. However, the analysis of the exit scenarios made apparent that time served could greatly fluctuate depending on the benefits that an individual was able to

⁹³² “What Our Neighbors Are Saying”, *The Times-Picayune*, October 6, 1932. Reproduced an article from *The St. Francisville Democrat*.

⁹³³ In recent years, state prisoners in Louisiana released through parole have made up only about three percent of all releases. Individuals convicted of nonviolent or less serious offenses have to serve a minimum of 25 percent of their maximum sentence before being eligible for parole. That term is 65 percent for first conviction of violent crime, and 75 percent for a second crime of violence or for a sex offense. There is no opportunity of parole release for adults who receive life sentences in Louisiana as well as in five other states. See: Reitz et al., “American Prison-Release Systems: Indeterminacy in Sentencing and the Control of Prison Population Size”, chapter 4.

secure during their incarceration. Robert H. Marr, President of the Board of Parole, gave the following example to the Attorney General:

Carrie W., penitentiary number 10705, was sentenced to from fifteen to twenty years. If she merits even good time under the commutation statute, she can serve her maximum sentence of twenty years in thirteen years and ten months – one year and two months less time than she can serve her minimum sentence in if it is not subject to commutation⁹³⁴.

This Black woman was admitted on March 13, 1917. She was paroled on August 6, 1922 after five years and five months at Angola, way before she had served the minimum of her sentence. Moreover, she received her final discharge on November 13, 1924, i.e. seven years and eight months after admission, and not twenty years according to the prescriptions of Act 125 cited above. Her case illustrates how the different mechanisms in place could give prisoners the opportunity to leave the penitentiary before the end of their term. It also shows that they were active agents in their release since they had to comply with penitentiary rules to demonstrate they deserved an early discharge, and to assert their rights through various application procedures.

6.3 An example: Manslaughter cases

In this section, I provide a detailed analysis of manslaughter cases found among women incarcerated at Angola. It allows for a measure of the variability of the punishment received for one consistent type of conviction. Between 1901 and 1935, 294 women were admitted to LSP following a conviction for manslaughter, the size of their group making it an interesting sample to examine. Among them, 276 were Black and 18 white. Manslaughter cases represented 47.2 percent of Black female convictions for crimes against persons and 28.7 percent of their total convictions, whereas they represented 50 percent of white female convictions for crimes

⁹³⁴ Application for parole from Joseph A. Lorey attorney at Baton Rouge enclosed in correspondence, Robert H. Marr President Board of Parole to Attorney General, 5 April 1917, Box 1, Collection P1978-139, Attorney General Correspondence 1916-1917, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

against persons and 19.3 percent of their total convictions. Unlike murder convictions, which generally resulted in life sentences, manslaughter convictions led to a variety of sentences, ranging from sixty days to twenty years, although more than half received sentences of less than ten years and the average over the period was 84.4 months (over seven years) (see figure 6.2 below). Both white and Black women received short sentences and long sentences, suggesting that race might not have been a factor in determining the duration of sentences so much as other factors such as the parish or the court's evaluation of the circumstances of the alleged crime. (However, the larger proportion of manslaughter convictions among white women convicted of violent crimes suggests that race might have been a factor in the prosecutors' decision to allow a woman to plead guilty of manslaughter to escape a murder charge.) Correlation tests also demonstrated that age, literacy score or birthplace did not influence the duration of the original sentence imposed by lower courts to women convicted of manslaughter. It does not appear that there was an evolution through the period 1901-1935 in the length of judicial sentences for manslaughter cases, but rather the various parish courts imposed a wide range of sentences for the same charge of manslaughter. In the figure below, each dot represents a woman (a black dot = one Black woman, a grey dot = one white woman).

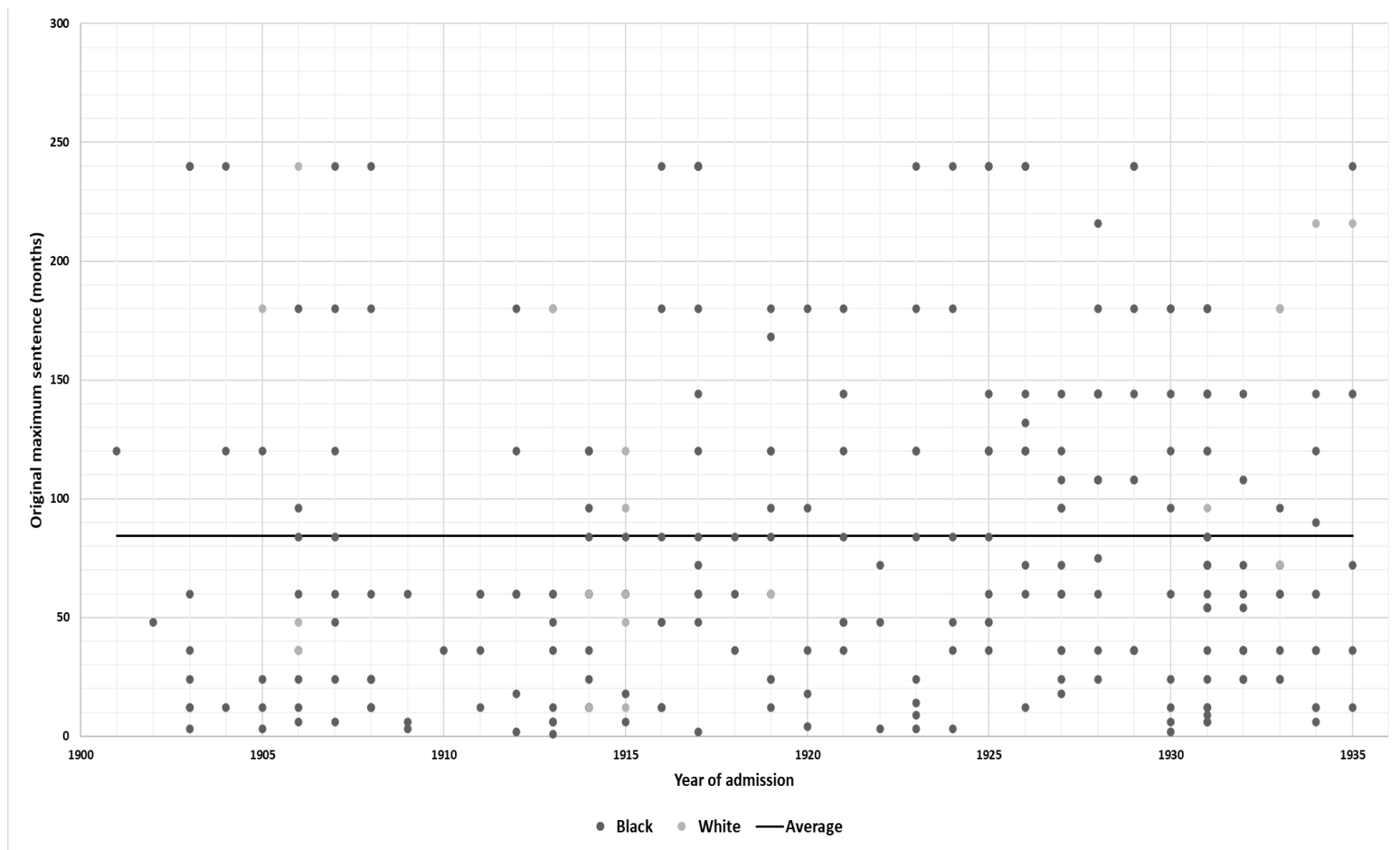


Figure 6.2: Distribution of original (maximum) sentences for women convicted of manslaughter, by year of admission, by race, in number of months (n=294)

Source: Angola Women's Database

Although it is hard to assess the extent of the situation without an exhaustive examination of all lower court records – an impossible exercise given the destruction and loss of many archival documents - it appears that for a large proportion of women at Angola, what distinguished a conviction for murder from one for manslaughter was the plea. In many cases retrieved in the archives, women were presented with the offer of pleading not guilty and facing a trial on a murder charge in front of a twelve-man jury, or accepting a guilty plea on the charge of manslaughter and being automatically sentenced to the state penitentiary, without the possibility of defending themselves during a trial or appealing the verdict. In some cases, the situation was the following: after being charged with murder, the woman first appeared in court without counsel and pled not guilty, then a counsel was appointed by the court because she was financially destitute. Then on her second appearance in court, the woman withdrew a first plea and entered a guilty plea for manslaughter. This was observed in the courts of several parishes, which suggests a pattern in which the defendant's attorney was instrumental in negotiating a "plea bargain" with the prosecutor, making innocence or culpability irrelevant to the legal conclusion of the case⁹³⁵. According to research, high rates of guilty pleas (including "initial" pleas) generally indicate "some form of threat, force, promise or inducement"⁹³⁶. The following table present data collected in three Louisiana parishes about all their female convictions. Unfortunately, this is only a sample because this same type of information was not available in all the courts visited for this research.

⁹³⁵ This suggests parallels with today's generalized resort to plea bargains used in 94% of felony cases at state level and 97% at federal level. Source: 2016 Bureau of Justice Statistics quoted in "Innocence Is Irrelevant", by Emily Yoffe, *The Atlantic*, August 5, 2017. The article mentions that rates are even higher for misdemeanors. The high level of plea bargains also fuels the industry of bail-out, mostly operated nowadays by private companies profiting from convicted persons' poverty. For more information, see: Daniels *et al.*, "From Bondage to Bail Bonds: Putting a Price on Freedom in New Orleans"; Miller, *The Two-Tiered Justice System: Money Bail in Historical Perspective*, The Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017.

⁹³⁶ Friedman, "Plea Bargaining in Historical Perspective", 254–55.

Table 6.13: Pleas entered by Black women convicted of manslaughter in three Louisiana parishes

Parish	Period	Total number of Black women convicted of manslaughter	Number of not guilty pleas (trials)	Number of guilty pleas (“initial” pleas)	Number of withdrawals and guilty pleas
Ouachita ⁹³⁷	1901-1936	17	11	3	2
East Carroll	1906-1936	9	1	6	2
Madison	1913-1936	9	3	5	1

Sources: Indictments and Information Records volumes F to O, Ouachita parish Clerk of Court, Monroe; Minute Books, East Carroll parish Clerk of Court, Lake Providence; Minute Books, Madison parish Clerk of Court, Tallulah

In his seminal work on the history of plea bargain in the U.S., George Fisher, scholar of criminal law, explains that plea bargaining has helped serve the interests of the powerful: “In the battlefield of the criminal courts, the kind of power that mattered most was the authority to dictate sentences, which judges had and prosecutors generally lacked”⁹³⁸. By allowing defendants to plead guilty to a lesser charge (manslaughter), Louisiana parish courts spared them life or death sentences for murder. When advising them, defense counsel must have warned Black women of the unlikelihood of winning at trial in front of a jury composed of twelve white men. Louisiana’s non-unanimous juries, codified in the Louisiana State Constitution of 1898, were also a strong “leverage to extract plea deals from defendants”:

If a prosecutor could go into a room [...] and tell someone, “Look, all I need to do is to get ten of the twelve people on this jury to flip; I don’t even need them all to believe me,” it instills fear in the defendant that their odds of being found not guilty in court are incredibly limited⁹³⁹.

In addition to the figure 6.2 presented above, the following table shows a great disparity between judicial sentences imposed by parish courts to Black women convicted of manslaughter; this disparity is both between parishes and within the same parish between women. This indicates that some judges were more severe than others, but also that judges were inclined to individualize

⁹³⁷ The information for one of the Ouachita cases was unavailable.

⁹³⁸ Fisher, *Plea Bargaining’s Triumph*, 2.

⁹³⁹ Aiello, *Jim Crow’s Last Stand : Nonunanimous Criminal Jury Verdicts in Louisiana*, 5; Quote from: Smith, *How the Word Is Passed*, 89.

sentences depending on the circumstances of the alleged crime or other factors such as the reputation of the defendant. The table also reveals that white women convicted of manslaughter received longer original sentences than their Black counterparts. Other studies have demonstrated the reluctance of courts to sentence white women to hard labor, which could mean that those sent to LSP were found guilty of “worse” crimes justifying longer sentences⁹⁴⁰. Some evidence suggests that Louisiana courts were hesitant to send whites to the penitentiary. For instance, in 1929 a judge from Ouachita Parish sentenced a 22-year-old white man to jail time because “he wished to avoid giving [him] a penitentiary sentence because of his age”⁹⁴¹. However, the same judge, Percy Sandel, sentenced Black women younger than him without the same hesitation: Penella B., then 17 years old, Sylviana W., and Annie Mae M. both 18 years old⁹⁴². Judge Sandel, as many whites during Jim Crow, did not recognize Black girls and boys as belonging to the youth category, i.e. vulnerable individuals deemed of protection and clemency.

⁹⁴⁰ Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery*, 174–75.

⁹⁴¹ “Young Man Given 12 Months’ Jail Term For Car Theft”, *The Monroe News-Star*, May 14, 1929.

⁹⁴² Entry #15885, Volume 26, no. 15501-16150, 1926; Entry #20418, Volume 33, no. 20101-20749, 1930-1931; Entry #21649, Volume 35, no. 21401-22050, 1931-1932, LSP Collection.

Table 6.14: Average and median minimum and maximum original sentences imposed on Black women convicted of manslaughter (number of months) compared to white women

Parish	Number of Black women	Average minimum sentence	Median minimum sentence	Average maximum sentence	Median maximum sentence
Bossier	11	32.0	24.0	51.5	36.0
Caddo	19	80.8	60.0	114.9	120.0
E. Baton Rouge	11	100.4	120.0	149.5	180.0
Madison	11	52.6	24.0	64.6	36.0
Orleans	30	83.2	72.0	113.6	114.0
Ouachita	17	57.9	48.0	71.3	60.0
Washington	14	60.9	48.0	98.1	114.0
Total Black women (all Louisiana parishes)	276	60.1	48.0	83.0	60.0
Total white women (all Louisiana parishes)	18	82.0	60.0	107.3	84.0

Source: Angola Women's Database

Some lower courts had a tendency to impose short sentences for manslaughter while others had a tendency to impose long sentences (for instance East Carroll and East Baton Rouge). In other parishes, there is a great gap between the shortest and the longest sentences imposed on individuals convicted of manslaughter. In some others, indeterminate sentences were used to impose a short minimum sentence and a long maximum sentence.

A great disparity also characterizes the time actually served at the penitentiary by women convicted of manslaughter. Some stayed only a few months while others stayed over ten years, the average being thirty months (i.e. two and a half years). Most stayed less than five years in captivity. The figure 6.3 below shows an evolution over the period, although not a linear one. With only a few exceptions, white women convicted of manslaughter stayed shorter periods at LSP than Black women (most whites stayed less than three years). One explanation of this trend is that white women were more likely to benefit from an earlier discharge by pardon or sentence commutation (a third of them) or to leave the penitentiary on parole or reprieve (over 40 percent

of them), whereas Black women were more likely to serve their original sentence only diminished through the provisions of the Good Time Law (half of them), as shown in the following table.

Table 6.15: Exit scenario for women convicted of manslaughter, by race

	Black woman (n=276)		White women (n=18)	
Good time law applied	134	48.6%	4	22.2%
Was paroled	78	28.3%	7	38.9%
Benefitted from reprieve	22	8.0%	1	5.6%
Pardoned	11	4.0%	4	22.2%
Received a commutation of sentence	13	4.7%	2	11.1%
Other scenarios (death, escape, unknown)	18	6.5%	0	0%

Source: Angola Women's Database

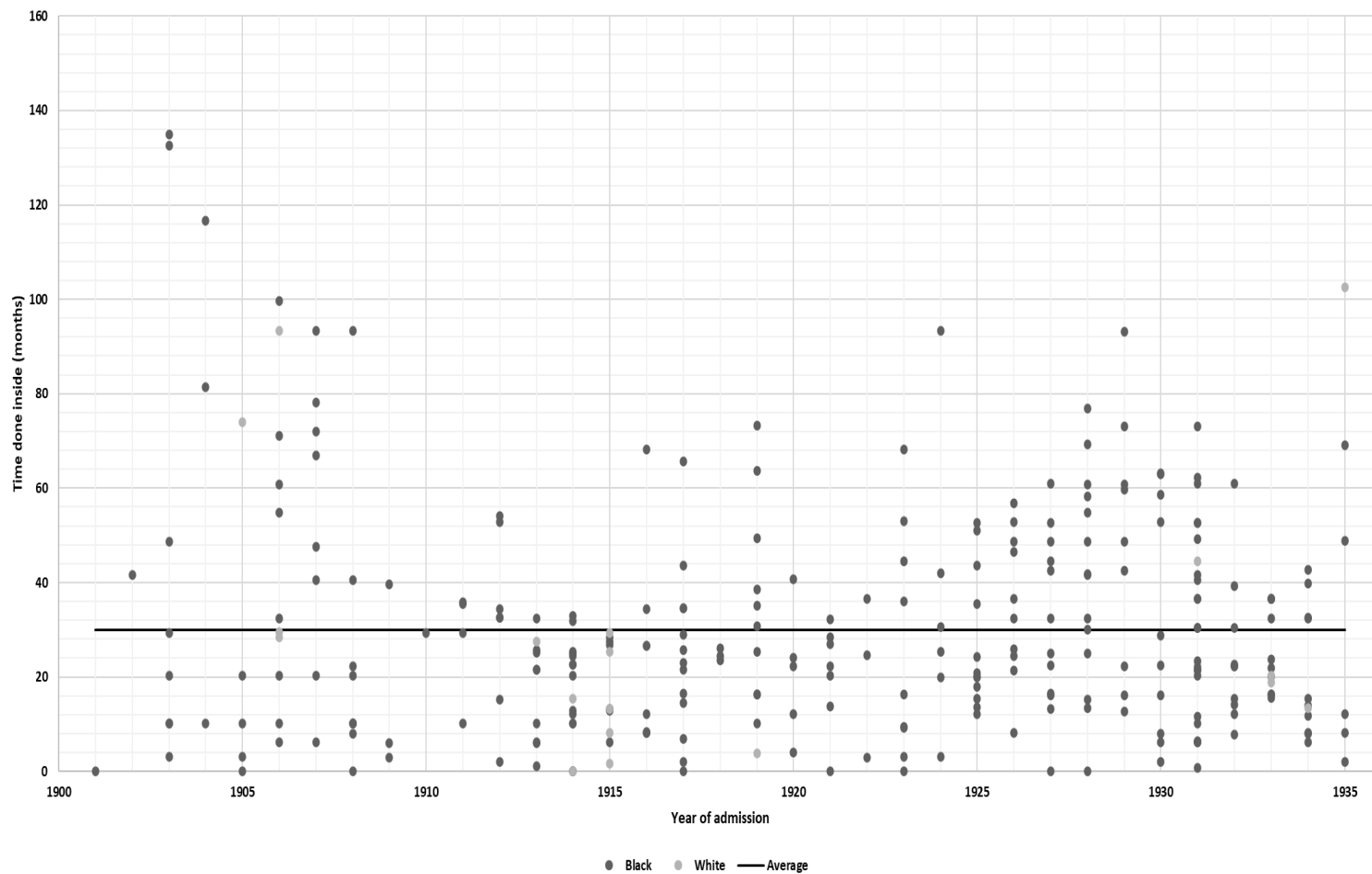


Figure 6.3: Distribution of time served at LSP for women convicted of manslaughter, by year of admission, by race, in number of months (n=294)
Source: Angola Women's Database

Examining the cases of manslaughter underlines the great disparity in original judicial sentences received (both between parishes, and within parishes) and terms actually served at LSP for crimes that were labelled identically. It also suggests that tensions were likely to arise from this blatant inequity among women who became dorm mates at Angola after receiving a similar conviction. It is easy to imagine that prisoners' ability to cope with time individually was consequently challenged constantly by what happened to others. Why would someone have a shorter sentence to serve? How could they obtain an earlier release? In turn, it exposes the challenges of the penal institution in imposing the same discipline on women who were serving different terms for the same type of crime.

Conclusion of chapter 6

Several factors shaped African American women's experiences of time during their incarceration. First, the judiciary externally controlled in part the time they would spend in captivity by making decisions on judicial sentences. Black women convicted in Louisiana parish criminal courts received judicial sentences varying greatly, including for the same type of criminal offenses (the disparity was even larger for crimes against persons). A third of them received sentences of less than a year, which meant these women were probably more likely to comply with prison rules and adjust to the carceral regime because they knew they would get out quickly. This is also suggested by the fact that, according to disciplinary records available for the period 1925-1935, only one woman out of sixty-four who had received a sentence of less than one year was punished during her time at Angola (although it is also possible that punishment was underreported for women with short sentences because it did not affect the time they would serve since the 'Good Time law' did not apply to them). On average, white women received longer sentences in Louisiana parish courts, which were reluctant to send white women to hard labor at the penitentiary, and, as a result, sent only the "worst" cases, i.e. women found guilty of the most

serious crimes⁹⁴³. Louisiana parish courts did not have the same hesitations when it came to convict Black women and girls. Indeed, a third of the Black female admissions concerned girls in their teens. The severity of the courts increased over time, including with the introduction of indeterminate sentencing in 1916. This impacted particularly Black women convicted of crimes against property, who received judicial terms almost twice as long as before the adoption of this legal mechanism. However, the courts were also more severe after 1916 with a small proportion of Black women convicted of crimes against persons who received very long (maximum) sentences.

On arrival, LSP prisoners probably had little idea of the difference between the judicial sentence they received in court and the sentence they would actually serve, with all the psychological impacts that uncertainty entailed. This was especially true for women who had received a life sentence, which, during the period, equated to ten and a half years of actual time served. The uncertainty was reinforced by the introduction of indeterminate sentencing as well as a variety of penitentiary policies and practices regarding the exit scenarios applicable to prisoners that were dependent on back-end discretion. These new measures meant that over time, the individualization of sentences increased. Penitentiary officials liked to say that the issue depended on the prisoners' own behavior during their incarceration, especially in regard to work and respect for prison rules. Those who managed to keep their records "clean" could hope for an earlier release, although there was actually no guarantee that someone with a compliant attitude would land a parole or a commutation.

During Jim Crow, Louisiana already had several forms of releasing discretion, which in itself raises the question of fairness. The inequity already observed in judicial sentences is also present at the other end of the penal system when it comes to actual time served. In the end, the time served had little to do with the severity of women's alleged crime. On average, Black women served less than two years at LSP and served only half of the original term determined by the parish court where they were convicted (see figures in Appendix G). However, the sentence served (in absolute and relative numbers, i.e. in proportion to the original sentence) varied greatly among women. Some individuals discharged on parole or reprieve would continue to "do time"

⁹⁴³ Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 155.

outside of the institution, often times working for employers who had the power to send them back to Angola with a single bad report. Half of the Black women left Angola after they completed their original sentence minus the Good Time they were awarded through labor and compliance (a fifth of these women were “fined” some of their time credits, probably for disciplinary reasons).

On average, white women served a smaller proportion of their original sentence than Black women because they were more likely to benefit from parole, commutation or pardon, especially those white women convicted of a crime against persons. Louisiana courts were reluctant to sentence white women to Angola and the white dominant society often interfered in order to support them during their judicial procedures, as well as afterwards to advocate on their behalf for an earlier release from the penitentiary. One example is the case of Savilla R. Convicted of murder and sentenced for life in 1904 after hundreds had attended her trial, this white woman was then pardoned in 1909. It seems that: “all the people of Grant [parish] were in favor of the pardon, and [...] the woman, if she had used other means than poison, would have been acquitted”. Poison, often considered as a woman’s favored method for homicide, was indicative of premeditation, therefore public’s support was more difficult to obtain. The case nevertheless suggests that public support was crucial for women who found themselves on the defendant’s bench, and that white women were more likely to get this support, even when charged with serious crimes⁹⁴⁴.

Among Black women, those convicted of crimes against persons (and who had received longer original sentences) were also more likely to benefit from advantageous release mechanisms such as parole, reprieve, pardon, and commutation, albeit in lesser proportions than white women. Release mechanisms formed an arsenal of incentives; however, they required compliance with penitentiary rules in addition to the skill to formulate (good) applications and the ability to secure whites’ support. In addition, postures of humility and supplication were oftentimes expected from Black women to obtain an earlier discharge. Several failed attempts might precede a positive decision, in turn giving women several reasons to keep or lose hope.

⁹⁴⁴ “Louisiana Affairs”, *The Times-Democrat*, December 23, 1909; Entry #1718, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907, LSP Collection.

This chapter explored how the State of Louisiana through its penal institution stole time from Black women's lives. It provided a quantitative measure of the time incarcerated Black women were stolen when taken away from their communities and daily lives. However, as a white woman incarcerated at Angola in the 1950s reminds us: "Three months here seems like ten years"⁹⁴⁵. This suggests that perceptions of time were deeply influenced by how this time was spent in custody. The next chapter examines how Black women experienced their time at LSP and sheds light on the fact that Black women spent most of their time at Angola working for the institution, which used their labor to enforce prison discipline, and to extract financial profit, as well as to reinforce racial and gender hierarchies. Chapter 7 also captures some of Black women's attempts to forge their own experience of prison time through their acts of resistance to prison discipline and coerced labor.

⁹⁴⁵ "In Our Mail Box", *The Weekly News*, September 29, 1951.

CHAPTER 7

BLACK WOMEN TOILING AT ANGOLA

They showed me how they kept time from breaking their spirits, how they got by it with humor, dignity and aplomb so that in the end they could go out the victors, strong and proud in the knowledge that they had routed that implacable enemy, time.

Helen Bryan about her cell mates at Anderson Reformatory (federal prison for women)⁹⁴⁶.

Incarceration during Jim Crow in spaces like the Angola penitentiary could be interpreted as an attempt to re-subordinate free Black men and women and impose another form of “temporal bondage” while:

Temporal freedom meant not only an abolition of the temporal constraints slave labor placed on New World Africans but also the freedom to construct individual and collective temporality that existed autonomously from (albeit contemporaneously with) the temporality of their former masters⁹⁴⁷.

Black liberation meant not only freedom of movement for African Americans, but also the right to dispose of time on their own terms and for their own purposes. After Emancipation, Black women were at the forefront of the struggles over the use and meanings of time: when they refused to continue working under the gang system in the fields in order to raise their children and take care of their own homes, when they sought pleasure in sexuality or in leisure activities such as dancing, or when they organized collectively through church or benevolent associations to provide services for their communities. Negative reactions to temporal claims of freed African

⁹⁴⁶ Bryan, *Inside*, 252.

⁹⁴⁷ Hanchard, “Afro-Modernity”, 257, 255.

Americans led to white critics of a so-called “lazy” culture and of “female loaferism” and ultimately led to segregation and racial terror⁹⁴⁸. To be sure, Black women continued to toil in the fields and in private household service, occupations where they were concentrated due to racial discrimination on the job market and obstacles to access education. Black women who found themselves incarcerated at Angola exemplify this condition: most of them had worked as agricultural or domestic workers before their troubles with justice and the penal institution exploited their skills and physical capacities to extract labor and generate profit. Labor was indeed central to the organization of time at Angola and took up most of the prisoners’ day.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the length of time spent at Angola, assuming that, like in other confinement spaces, it “was of more consequence” as far as their prison experiences were concerned than the initial reason why Black women were at Angola, i.e. their conviction and alleged crime⁹⁴⁹. In this chapter, we will explore how the institution controlled Black women’s time through a rigid schedule imposed on their day and night activities. Indeed, studies conducted with incarcerated individuals have long concluded that: “a prison sentence incorporates the temporal order of punishment in the confined carceral space”⁹⁵⁰. Despite the strong constraints represented by a schedule dominated by work tasks, prisoners exercised agency and engaged actively with time and attempted to shape their own experiences of time, either through their attendance at church and religious activities, at literacy classes (when they were available in the later period), or through their participation in leisure activities such as gambling, or developing personal relationships with their mates, which all may have influenced their perception of time. Black women also shaped their time in confinement by engaging in actions that disrupted the penitentiary routine, even if that meant paying the heavy price of corporal punishment as retaliation.

⁹⁴⁸ Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 45, 108.

⁹⁴⁹ Bryan, *Inside*, 234.

⁹⁵⁰ Middlemass and Smiley, “Doing a Bid”, 794.

7.1 A rigid and monotonous schedule

Admission to the penitentiary followed a similar sequence of events for most women: alleged commission of the crime, arrest, judicial procedures and conviction. Despite similarities between individuals, the length of time between the alleged crime and the admission actually varied quite a lot. In some cases, Black women had spent a few months in the parish jail before being transported to the penitentiary (for instance if they had appealed to the Supreme Court) while in some others, they found themselves at Angola within a few days of their arrest. Their experience of their first day, described in chapters 4 and 5, was therefore tainted by what they had experienced before, in the hands of the police, the parish court and jail, as well as the circumstances that brought them to this confrontation with white justice. Every individual arriving at LSP had to grapple with their first day in confinement: now invisible to the outside world, they were assigned a “convict number”, which the penitentiary officials considered the marker of their new identity. After their admission to LSP, they had to adapt themselves to a new routine, marked by repetition of the same daily activities. Often described as monotonous and uneventful, the time in prison has few markers: “Days pass and look alike, almost in a blur. Indeed, the sequencing of time does not change, and the schedule is constant (awakening, meals and so forth) only marked day and night by guards’ beats”⁹⁵¹.

Here, sociological studies of prisoners’ lived experience help us understand the nature of time in prison as “slow, repetitive, and abstract”. One of the few markers of time that is specific to the prison experience is “the count”, i.e. the moment throughout the day when prisoners are counted by guards to ensure that there has been no escape. According to Keesha Middlemass: “The count is institutionalized into the lived pattern of being an inmate, and conducted at such regular intervals, every day and night, that the count becomes a way to keep time”⁹⁵².

⁹⁵¹ [our translation from] *Les jours passent et se ressemblent jusqu’à l’indistinction*. En effet, le séquençage du temps est invariable, avec un emploi du temps (réveil, promenade, repas) immuable, marqué, jour et nuit, par les rondes des surveillants. In: Ricordeau, “« Faire son temps » et « attendre »”, 62.

⁹⁵² Middlemass and Smiley, “Doing a Bid”, 797.

Because prisoners repeat the same activities every day for weeks, months and sometimes years, in monotonous succession, it gives the impression that time is static⁹⁵³. For some women incarcerated at Anderson Federal penitentiary in the early 1960s, “to survive in the prison world” required operating an emotional detachment allowing time to “be psychologically collapsed to the immediate present, a present that places severe limits on the extent to which the inmate is psychologically bound up with events and individuals associated with the past and present in outside society”⁹⁵⁴.

By imposing a rigid and repetitive schedule, the prison bureaucracy “deprives prisoners of their time”, leaving both very little autonomy in the organization of time and very little time for any individual initiative or unsupervised activity⁹⁵⁵. Prisoners often described time in prison as radically different than on the outside and as something they endured rather than control, to the point of feeling powerless:

Time does not pass. It is static, unmovable force - dark, threatening. You are in its power, enclosed and encircled by its shadow. Your task is to get by it, for it will never move by you. You try to push it, but it only increases in size. You try to get ahead of it to force it behind you, but neither you nor it moves and it is there, in all its immensity, towering above you.

In prison, time is omnipotent; its omnipotence expresses itself in its immobility. Its powers of preventing your progress past it are uncanny. You think you have found the way but as you start upon it, the way turns into water and you find yourself treading that water, getting nowhere. Then you think you have found a firm road on which you can walk or run past time and you start out overjoyed, only to find that the road is quicksand. Not only can you make no progress; you are being sucked down into this non-moving force and instead of getting past it you are becoming a part of it. [...] Time holds your liberty in tight-clenched hands and sucks out your life⁹⁵⁶.

“Temporal dislocation” contributes to the predicament of “living death”, a term used by Black radical intellectual and political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, who described his own incarceration as being “entombed in a juridical, psychic and temporal box”. His depiction of “neoslavery” also

⁹⁵³ Moran, “‘Doing Time’ in Carceral Space”, 311.

⁹⁵⁴ Giallombardo, *Society of Women*, 133.

⁹⁵⁵ Goffman, *Asylums. Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, 45; Rostaing, *La relation carcérale. Identités et rapports sociaux dans les prisons pour femmes*, 126; Ricordeau, “« Faire son temps » et « attendre »”, 62.

⁹⁵⁶ Bryan, *Inside*, 235–36.

highlights similarities between chattel slavery and incarceration, between the past and the present⁹⁵⁷. Indeed, “For slaves, time management was an imposition of the slave master’s construction of temporality divided along the axis of the master-slave relationship”. Therefore, “slaves could only struggle for the appropriation of time”, which was highly contested by slaveholders⁹⁵⁸.

7.2 “From sunup to sundown”

Throughout the history, coerced labor has been a key feature of the penitentiary as well as of other “sites of punitive relocations” such as penal colonies⁹⁵⁹. For instance, when bridewells, the first English houses of correction, were created at the end of the 16th century (the first one opened in London in 1556), they were designed for the confinement of idle, criminal and destitute women and men. They were “penal instruments specifically designed to correct the faults of a servant class”. In bridewells, incarcerated individuals “were to be subjected to a formalized and peculiarly rigorous form of domestic or workplace discipline: they might be whipped, and were to be kept at ‘hard labour’ in manufacturing or some other suitable employment”⁹⁶⁰. For instance, at London bridewell, women were “required to cook, clean, launder, and provide general services for both male and female inmates” while they were also engaged in commodity production (such as silk lace gloves and felt hose)⁹⁶¹. The centrality of coerced labor in the institutions of confinement remained an attribute over the course of the following centuries. Labor was considered both as the best way to prevent crime as well as the best punishment for crime⁹⁶². In

⁹⁵⁷ Mumia Abu-Jamal, “Teetering on the Brink: Between Death and Life” quoted in Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 4.

⁹⁵⁸ Hanchard, “Afro-Modernity”, 254.

⁹⁵⁹ Rusche and Kirchheimer, *Punishment and Social Structure*; Anderson, *Convicts: A Global History*.

⁹⁶⁰ Innes, “Prisons for the Poor: English Bridewells, 1555-1800”, 42, 47. I am grateful to Donald Fyson for bringing this reference to my knowledge.

⁹⁶¹ Dobash, Dobash, and Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women*, 24–25.

⁹⁶² Jean-Paul Brodeur in: Lafleur, *Foucault à Montréal*, 16.

1827, famous reformer Elizabeth Fry interested in conditions for women in prison wrote: “No prison can be considered complete, which does not afford the means of hard labour, which properly pertains to a reforming discipline, and forms an important part of the system of punishment”, arguing that “reforming” women could be pursued through coerced work⁹⁶³. Angela Davis observed:

In the philosophical tradition of the penitentiary, labor was a reforming activity. It was supposed to assist the imprisoned individual in his (and on occasion her) putative quest for religious penitence and moral reeducation. Labor was a means to a moral end⁹⁶⁴.

Historical and sociological studies conducted in different areas and periods concur to show the intricacy of the relationship between labor and confinement: labor is sometimes conceived as a punishment, sometimes presented as a means of rehabilitation⁹⁶⁵. LSP did not endorse and enact a rehabilitation ideal before the 1950s, and work on the penal farm was intended to either be “productive”, i.e. generating profits for the institution from the sales of crops such as cotton and sugar, or “non productive”, i.e. sustaining the institution’s daily functioning. Prison officials did not see the need for prisoners to acquire professional skills that could prove useful after incarceration, for instance to avoid recidivism. Instead, they seemed to perceive coerced work as a means in itself in order to correct idleness and to teach the “criminal class” a certain work ethic. Moreover, LSP officials’ expectations for financial profit superseded their intention of achieving prisoners’ rehabilitation⁹⁶⁶. As in other prisons, the acquisition of skills or the learning of a trade were less important than re-education through discipline, and the acceptance of long hours doing tedious tasks⁹⁶⁷. In 1947, LSP officials declared that: “Training of a special nature must be provided for women inmates, such as home economics, secretarial science, beauty culture and

⁹⁶³ Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the Siting, Superintendence and Government of Female Prisoners*, 1827, Quoted by Dobash, Dobash, and Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women*, 51.

⁹⁶⁴ In “Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition”, *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, 99. Quoted by: Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 202.

⁹⁶⁵ Morelle, Planel, and Tiquet, “Mise En Travail, Prison et Enfermement. Perspectives Africaines”, 84.

⁹⁶⁶ Louisiana’s constitution still contains language mirroring the federal Thirteenth Amendment allowing slavery and involuntary servitude to be used as punishment for a criminal conviction, as it is the case for nineteen other states. Source: American Civil Liberties Union and the University of Chicago Law School Global Human Rights Clinic, “Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers”, 2022. See also: Armstrong, “Slavery Revisited in Penal Plantation Labor”.

⁹⁶⁷ Heiniger, “La Valeur Du Travail En Internement Administratif Dans Les Établissements Pénitentiaires de Bellechasse”, 349.

other types of occupations in which they are likely to engage in civil life”, but once again, they were only paying lip service to an ideal not reflecting reality, and least of all for Black women⁹⁶⁸.

At Angola, the workweek extended from Monday to Saturday, and workdays were long. However, no official document reveals the exact working hours in place, which were probably dependent on sunlight as well as on seasonal needs such as harvest or processing sugar cane⁹⁶⁹. As the following quote makes clear, most of Angola prisoners’ days were spent working:

May 30, 1936: [...] It is just another work-day here on the Gola. Rap-up at 4 in the morning; out in the field by 4:30; in for supper at 7:15pm: and to bed at 8:30. Early to bed and early to rise sure as hell won’t make anyone on the Gola healthy, wealthy OR wise⁹⁷⁰!

In 1912, the Louisiana Legislature introduced a law requiring regulations for prisoners’ minimum and maximum working hours. In reaction, the Board stated that it was “absolutely impossible to carry out this law, and to attempt to do so would be to restrict and hamper the operations of the whole system”. Their argument was not only seasonal needs or weather, but also the variety of tasks which prisoners were required to perform and the variety of work contexts in which they were performing these tasks. (Cooks for instance were required to wake up before every other prisoner to prepare breakfast). Concluding to “the impossibility of any set rules” for work hours, the Board recommended that the section of the law be repealed, plain and simple, rejecting the Legislature’s attempt to interfere with the penitentiary management of its coerced labor force⁹⁷¹. The same ‘flexible’ situation prevailed decades later when in 1959, in order “to take care of the spring work load on the farm projects”, the “work schedule has been rearranged for the inmate population of the penitentiary in order to take advantage of the longer days and add one hour to the time spent on various jobs”⁹⁷².

⁹⁶⁸ Source: State of Louisiana, Biennial Report of Department of Institutions, July 1, 1945 to June 30, 1947, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC. Quote on page 65.

⁹⁶⁹ “Sugar cane is a perishable commodity, and it must be processed quickly (ideally within twenty-four hours) after it is cut”. Follett, “The Rise and Fall of American Sugar”, 74.

⁹⁷⁰ William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget” account of 1936, published in *The Angolite* Volume 1, no 9, May 30, 1953.

⁹⁷¹ Source: Board of Control, Louisiana State Penitentiary, Biennial Report 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quotes on page 16-17.

⁹⁷² Source: Board meeting minutes, 19 March 1959, Collection P1983-580, State Board of Institutions, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

As mentioned earlier, labor occupied a central place in prisoners' daily life on the penitentiary-plantation first and foremost because of the economic and financial imperative. Prisoners' labor lowered functioning costs for the prison, or rather compensated for the meager provisions made by the Louisiana Legislature to operate State institutions. Coerced penal labor also allowed the State of Louisiana a certain degree of control over its work force and over the development of public infrastructures such as roads or levees⁹⁷³. As Danielle Laberge has argued, financial sustainability was the target of many penal institutions in the U.S. because of the dominant political position that prisons should not cost anything to taxpayers and that their funding should rather rely entirely on prisoners' labor⁹⁷⁴. This economic and financial imperative pre-dated the establishment of the penal farm at Angola and was prevalent in the convict leasing system (see chapter 3). By terminating the lease and taking over operations, the State of Louisiana sought to establish a decentralized penal system comprising of several farms and levee camps that would be self-sustaining or, even better, would generate profits for the State. In this context, Angola had the biggest potential because of its size, its location and natural resources: thousands of acres of the best river-bottom land favorable to sugar cane production, hundreds of acres of cypress in the uncleared river bottoms, and a virgin forest in the loess formation (the Tunica hills). For instance, lumbering became such a profitable operation during the 1900s that a railroad line was built through and crisscrossed Angola plantation⁹⁷⁵. Although the previous lease was ended officially in March 1901, it was agreed that to be able to start its agricultural project and obtain crops during its first year of operation, the State would take over in January 1901⁹⁷⁶. Governor Heard was among Louisianans thrilled by the new "great industrial and business enterprise" conducted at the expense of unfree laborers' sweat and blood⁹⁷⁷. Warden W.H. Reynaud stated: "The Angola plantation is a big thing for the state, and it will prove to be one of the best investments

⁹⁷³ For a contemporary discussion on the issue, see: Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*; Garland, *The Culture of Control. Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.

⁹⁷⁴ Laberge, "Travail forcé et enfermement pénal. Quelques questions sur la naissance de la prison aux États-Unis", 226.

⁹⁷⁵ See photographs in: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report 1904-1905, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC.

⁹⁷⁶ Source: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC.

⁹⁷⁷ Governor Heard, House Journal, 1902, quoted by: Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 94.

ever made”. He was expecting at least 2,000 bales of cotton for the first crop⁹⁷⁸. Heard and Reynaud’s statements suggest that Louisiana officials intended not only to keep LSP as a custodial institution that should cost the least money possible to the State, but also to turn it into a “cash cow”. A Board of Control was created overseeing LSP and some other Louisiana institutions, with its members authorized to visit and report on jails, penal farms, asylums, hospitals and reformatories. No budget was allocated to it and it was powerless when it came to the penitentiary operations⁹⁷⁹. The penitentiary would later be placed under the authority of a General Manager who controlled operations from Baton Rouge, and some decades later to a Board of Institutions, also located in the capital city. Direct operations at Angola were mostly entrusted with men who had previous farming experience and who would find ways to maximize the crops.

At risk of “being inundated and ruined [annually] by the mightiest river in North America”, Angola was nevertheless self-supporting by the early 1920s thanks to its agricultural production⁹⁸⁰. The expansion of the boll weevil to Louisiana prompted the LSP authorities to turn to sugar cane⁹⁸¹. In 1908, the beetle had eaten cotton buds and flowers, destroying fifty percent of Angola’s main crop. The following year, it destroyed seventy five percent of the crop. LSP decided to plant four hundred acres with sugar, which turned out to be a “very profitable” crop, especially after a sugar mill had been installed where other local producers were also able to bring their production to be grinded⁹⁸². In December 1909, Angola prisoners were cutting their first sugar cane under the surveillance of armed white guards. Cane cutting was extremely time-

⁹⁷⁸ “Convict Farms Doing Well”, *The Daily Picayune*, May 14, 1901.

⁹⁷⁹ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, chap. 4.

⁹⁸⁰ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 120.

⁹⁸¹ “the boll weevil arrived in Texas from Mexico in 1892, the result of the spread of farming on both sides of the border. Over the next thirty years, the weevil moved east in a path both inexorable and unpredictable, borne by the wind from one cotton field to another, ten or a hundred miles at a time all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. The insects multiplied in pestilential numbers. [...] Louisiana produced 40 percent less [than before the boll weevil]. [...] The mobile tenant and labourer population surged into nearby counties, where planters rushed to get a crop before the weevil arrived. [...] The boll weevil [...] did not drive Black or white farmworkers out of the cotton South before 1915. Rather, the voracious insect led people to migrate within the South, in every direction, often in short and strategic moves”. Ayers, *Southern Journey*, 65.

⁹⁸² Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; “The Board of Control Will Erect a Sugar Mill at Angola”, “The Way Opened for Cane-Raising”, *The True Democrat*, December 4, 1909.

sensitive because the cane had to be cut before the winter cold and processed before it spoiled. Saturday, December 11, 1909 was at the end of the grinding season, and the cane had to be cut down quickly. During cane cutting, most Angola prisoners, including Black women, were required to labor in the fields. Saturday was usually the last working day of the week, but during this season, Sundays could sometimes be worked as well, which prisoners resented. The announcement of an extra day of labor seems plausible in this context. It also meant no day at all to rest between the weeks. This could have sparked the Black women's discontent. It could even have sparked the collective action in which fifteen of them participated on December 11, 1909 when they pronounced "threats" and "disobeyed" their captain. In this scenario, the event would be the only recorded collective protest against labor conditions to be led by Black female prisoners. For protesting against their economic exploitation, they were punished by the lash.

In 1921, Angola was "the fourth largest sugar refinery south of the Mason-Dixon line" thanks to its prisoners producing six million pounds of granulated sugar and one million pounds of lump sugar⁹⁸³. By 1942, the farm had doubled its sugar production to twelve million pounds and added an extensive vegetable crop⁹⁸⁴. The 'Long machine', i.e. Governor Huey P. Long and his successors, had managed to put the penitentiary 'on a paying basis', which was "one of [their] proudest boasts" according to a 1941 *Times-Picayune* article⁹⁸⁵.

In its pursuit of profit, LSP had to deal with several obstacles other than Mississippi floods. In 1929, Congress passed the Hawes-Cooper Act enabling any State to prohibit the sale of goods made in prisons in other States. The Great Depression delayed its implementation, and it only became effective in 1934. To avoid competition with free labor, the Louisiana Legislature adopted Act 169 in 1936 prohibiting the sale in the State of "goods, wares or merchandise manufactured, in whole or in part, out of leather, iron, textiles, lumber or vegetable fibre, by convicts or prisoners", leaving sugar cane as the principal source of revenue for LSP⁹⁸⁶. In 1940,

⁹⁸³ Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., "Life in a Prison Deluxe in Louisiana", *Literary Digest*. LXXVII (April 21, 1923), 52, quoted by: Mouledous, "Organizational Goals and Structural Change", 77.

⁹⁸⁴ W.T. Mitchiner, "Angola - Louisiana Penal Farm", *Louisiana Municipal Review*, VI (1943), p. 7. Quoted by: Mouledous, "Organizational Goals and Structural Change", 78.

⁹⁸⁵ Quoted in: Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women, Part 2: 1901-1950."

⁹⁸⁶ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 129.

Congress adopted a new legislation (effective the following year) prohibiting the transportation into any State of prison goods made in another. Despite the federal legislation, the many crops grown at the penitentiary-plantation by unfree workers were sold to generate profit for the State of Louisiana. William Sadler, a former white male prisoner, author of the 1943 chronicle “Hell on Angola” in the newspaper *The New Orleans Item* made the connection between prisoners’ unwaged labor and the institution’s financial gains. LSP general manager had:

contracted with a Chicago firm which specialized in the merchandizing of pre-season vegetables. The Chicago company furnished the seed and fertilizer, Angola the land and slaves. Northern tables received radishes in February, spinach in March, carrots and other roots in April, tomatoes, onions and potatoes in May. And to evade the U.S. statutes regarding shipment out of the state of convict-made goods, each crate or box of produce bore the label of the Chicago firm, grown and packed at “Golan, Louisiana”⁹⁸⁷.

It seems that other American penal institutions employed the same kind of scheme to circumvent legal obstacles and sell prison-made goods. Kate Richards O’Hare, a political prisoner at Missouri State penitentiary in 1919-1920, recounted that prison-made goods (such as the jackets she made in the penitentiary tailor shop) were fraudulently labeled because of “a deep-seated repugnance in the heart of every really normal and decent person against wearing prison-made goods; there is a feel and smell of blood about them discernible to the soul if not to the physical senses of men”⁹⁸⁸. Prisoners’ coerced labor produced wealth around the country, as is attested by the following figures. The U.S. Bureau of Labor estimated the total value of commodities produced in 104 state and federal civilian prisons for adults at \$75,622,983 for the year 1923. Out of a population of 84,761 prisoners in 104 institutions, 51,799 (two thirds) produced several hundred commodities. The value of goods placed on the market amounted to \$44,843,355. Goods consumed in state or governmental institutions and public works accounted for the rest. The last third of the prison workforce (about 25,000 individuals) was used for maintenance: prison upkeep, cleaning, laundry, repairs, cooking and so on. The Associated General Contractors of America estimated that in 1930, 75,000 prisoners had produced goods with a market value of \$100,000,000. Around the same time, Senator Harry B. Hawes of Missouri stated that \$40,000,000 to \$50,000,000 worth of “convict-made merchandise” moved in interstate commerce

⁹⁸⁷ “Hell on Angola”, *The New Orleans Item*, July 6, 1943.

⁹⁸⁸ Kate Richards O’Hare, *Crime and Criminals*. Quoted by: Franklin, *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America*, 86.

annually⁹⁸⁹. Crops represented a significant part of the prison production across the U.S. In 1932, over a quarter-million acres of land in the country were cultivated by prisoners, and agriculture was dominant in Southern states with large penal farms operating in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi⁹⁹⁰. Louisiana was also using its state prisoners for roads and other public jobs, such as levee construction. In 1923, such work performed by prisoners was valued at over \$15,000,000 for the entire country⁹⁹¹.

If Angola became (at least for a period) a “cash cow” for the State, prisoners’ unwaged labor also benefited directly some of its politicians. William Sadler recounted that in 1936, along with other detainees, he was made to paint electoral signs for Governor-Elect Leche’s inaugural parade⁹⁹². According to Sadler, LSP staff was also contributing to Governor Leche’s campaign through a “required” financial participation: “Each employee, from captain down to foreman, must kick in from 10 to 25 percent of his monthly paycheck. It’s either that or quit”⁹⁹³. Ten of Sadler’s fellow prisoners at Camp E were working in the Shoe Shop making shoes for the penitentiary population as well as “belts and saddles and cowboy boots for certain state politicians. All for free, of course”⁹⁹⁴. Fifteen years later, in 1951, it was discovered that some Black LSP prisoners were working at Governor Earl K. Long’s private estate in Winn parish. The press reported that Attorney General Bolivar E. Kemp “handed down a ruling that Gov. Long was in his rights using convict labor on his farm, since previous governors had done likewise”. Black prisoners were

⁹⁸⁹ Quoted by Wilson, *Forced Labor in the United States*, 34–35, 43.

⁹⁹⁰ Today, incarcerated workers are tasked with agricultural work on penal plantations or prison farms in Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Texas. In Louisiana, they are paid two cents an hour for working in the fields “with limited access to water, minimal rest, and no restroom facilities, under the supervision of armed correctional officers on horseback”. Solitary confinement is used against unwilling or unable workers or those who do not work fast enough. Source: American Civil Liberties Union and the University of Chicago Law School Global Human Rights Clinic, “Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers”, 2022. Agricultural work performed by prisoners on southern penal farms has repeatedly been compared to slavery conditions by activists, scholars and prisoners themselves. Legal scholar Andrea Armstrong argues that: “When a prisoner is forced to labor on a plantation, he is ritually marked as enslaved”. Armstrong, “Slavery Revisited in Penal Plantation Labor”, 887.

⁹⁹¹ Wilson, *Forced Labor in the United States*, 37.

⁹⁹² William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget”, account of 1936 published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 7, May 16, 1953.

⁹⁹³ William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget”, account of 1936 published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 9, May 30, 1953.

⁹⁹⁴ William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget”, account of 1936 published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 11, June 13, 1953. See also “Hell on Angola”, *The New Orleans Item*, July 13, 1943.

also “found working on a ballpark at St. Francisville, and others had been paroled to plantation owners”⁹⁹⁵. Another Black man made the news the same year because he was granted a furlough to work at a dairy farm in East Baton Rouge parish for \$20 a week and was forced to stay in a state of peonage⁹⁹⁶. Historian Mark Carleton provides numerous other examples under different administrations of how Louisiana politicians did “subordinate completely penological objectives to political considerations of cost, race and patronage”⁹⁹⁷.

Carleton concluded from his study of LSP that: “Both the facilities and the philosophy of prisons in the South, especially in the Deep South, were tailor made for black convicts as viewed by their former white masters in the post-Civil War period”⁹⁹⁸. Indeed, economic exploitation alone cannot explain the central place of coerced labor at LSP; anti-Blackness being key to understand the choices put forward by the institution⁹⁹⁹. If labor had not a rehabilitative purpose at LSP, it was because African Americans were considered “incorrigible” as is demonstrated by this 1914 statement from the president of the Board of Control: “the vices and defects” of African Americans being “well known”, it would be foolish to apply the penal methods developed “in some other wealthier states, where only white men are dealt with”¹⁰⁰⁰. As scholar Dennis Childs argued: “interested white supremacist fables of black incorrigibility, unproductivity, atavism, and acclimated servility” had shaped chattel slavery and continued to shape experiences of “neo-slavery” in the carceral system. According to Angela Davis, chattel slavery “constructed” enslaved men, women and children “as labor units” and “labor was the only thing that mattered [...] Thus punishment was designed to maximize labor. And in a larger sense, labor was punishment attached not to crime, but to race”¹⁰⁰¹. Drawing on Orlando Patterson’s concept of

⁹⁹⁵ “Prison Cruelties To Negro Inmates At Angola Exposed”, *The Louisiana Weekly*, November 3, 1951.

⁹⁹⁶ “Peonage is Forced on Negro Convicts”, *The Louisiana Weekly*, December 15, 1951.

⁹⁹⁷ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 194.

⁹⁹⁸ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 197.

⁹⁹⁹ Wang, “Against Innocence: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Safety”, 8.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on pages 17-18.

¹⁰⁰¹ In “Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition”, The Angela Y. Davis Reader, 99. Quoted in: Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 202. Other scholars have argued that Black people - either enslaved, incarcerated or free - have never belonged to the workers’ category. Frank B. Wilderson III points out that the fact that Black people work does not obliterate the reality that they are not conceived as workers, but as fungible commodities. “The point is we were never meant to be workers; in other words, capital/white supremacy’s dream did not envision us as being

“social death”, Jackie Wang affirmed that: “Forced labor is undoubtedly a part of the slave’s experience, but it is not what defines the slave relation”. Similarly, the Black prisoner is not exploited as a worker but rather “marked as disposable” by practices of coerced labor¹⁰⁰².

As the following section makes it clear, during Jim Crow, Black women were coerced to labor for the State while incarcerated at LSP, and the various tasks that the institution assigned to them contributed to a racialized and gendered hierarchy inside the penitentiary-plantation, similar in some ways, but distinct in other ways, to the one existing outside.

7.3 Labor assignments

As mentioned earlier, women were assigned a wide variety of tasks, labelled “productive” or “non productive” by the penitentiary authorities. The following table presents the tasks assigned to women at LSP and reveals three main categories of tasks: agricultural, prison maintenance and domestic service¹⁰⁰³.

incorporated or incorporative. From the very beginning, we were meant to be accumulated and die”. Wilderson, “The Prison Slave as Hegemony’s (Silent) Scandal”, 238.

¹⁰⁰² Wang, “Against Innocence”, 8.

¹⁰⁰³ The information was available only for women admitted over the period 1925-1935, and even then it was not available for most women who received short sentences from the parish courts (shorter than eleven months in general), the reason most probably being that while the tasks in question were indicated in records to keep track on how “good time” was earned, these women were not entitled to “good time”. Similarly we can assume that punishments are under-reported in the same documents because they did not affect the length of incarceration for individuals with short sentences, whereas they did for sentences above twelve months (not only through “good time” credited but also through eligibility for parole or the chance to obtain commutation).

Table 7.1: Distribution of women according to labor assignments (for women admitted 1925-1935)

Task assigned	Black women	white women	Total women
Field work	120	1	121
Laundry (Camp D or Baton Rouge receiving station)	77	6	83
Servant, nurse, or laundress for free personnel	76	0	76
Orderlies	36	2	38
Seamstress, Tailor shop	6	30	36
Garden, flowers, attending chickens, milking cows	26	0	26
Cook, waiter for dining room	20	5	25
Tobacco factory	17	0	17
Gate keeper, guard	10	3	13
Hospital nurse, hospital steward or assistant steward	8	0	8
Others (yard work, water girl, plow woman, commissary, clerk, canning factory)	17	4	21
Non available	79	12	91
Total women admitted over the period (women could have more than one assignment over the period of their incarceration)	382	49	431

Source: Angola Women's Database

According to the Convict Records, women could execute more than one type of task over the period of their incarceration. Two thirds of Black women were assigned to only one task, a quarter to two tasks, and less than ten percent executed three or four different tasks during their

time at LSP. The case of Lodie H. is therefore relatively exceptional but is still pertinent to illustrate the variety of settings where Black women were working while incarcerated, and the labor power and the variety of skills that they were required to display. Admitted with a life sentence after a conviction in Orleans parish in March 1933, Lodie H. was first assigned to the “yard” at Camp D, then she became servant for Mr. Greely, a foreman at Angola, from February 1934 to September 1936, when she was transferred to the laundry, then to the tobacco factory, then back to the laundry in March 1941, then back to the tobacco house the following month apparently until her discharge in March 1944¹⁰⁰⁴.

7.3.1 Toiling in the fields

Black women were active participants in the penal farm enterprise that Louisiana conducted at Angola. In the 1910s, at any moment five hundred prisoners were laboring in the fields, with the objective that “if properly handled, this property can go on maintaining their own keep, farming expenses and pay more or less profit to meet the overhead expenses”¹⁰⁰⁵. Indeed, over forty percent of Black women were doing “field work” (although it is plausible than women with short sentences were also sent to the fields, since it might have been the assignment for which it was easiest to deal with a high turnover of individuals). In addition, a few of them were “water girls” (bringing water to other field workers on the job) or “plow women” (conducting mules to plow the fields), a task usually requiring a greater physical strength. Interestingly, only 15 of them had been farm workers prior to their incarceration (12.5% when this proportion was of 8.2% for those admitted in 1925-1935). Among the 120 Black women who performed field work, 41 had received a conviction of a crime against property and 77 of a crime against persons, which follows the same pattern that Black women’s admissions during the period, suggesting that their alleged crime did not influence whether they would work in the fields.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Entry #23341, Volume 37, no. 22701-23350, 1932-1933, LSP Collection.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Source: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 15.

Black women contributed to the cultivation of cotton at Angola, the first commercial crop cultivated by LSP. In 1901, most of them joined male “cotton hands” and, according to Warden W.H. Reynaud, were “doing splendid work”¹⁰⁰⁶. R.N. Sims, a member of the Board of Control, said boldly of Black women that they “like field work”¹⁰⁰⁷. Cotton was a labor-intensive crop and, because of the availability of coerced and unpaid laborers, mechanization arrived at Angola even later than the 1940s, when most outside farmers turned towards mechanized harvesting¹⁰⁰⁸. The best cotton pickers were celebrated at Angola, which might be an indication that penitentiary officials tried to break up attempts of go-slows on the ‘line’ (gang work)¹⁰⁰⁹. Thirty-seven women, all Black, were also given “special good time” for “cane cutting”, showing that Black women worked besides men at least occasionally during the intense and short harvest season of sugar cane, in order to avoid frost damage¹⁰¹⁰. Records are unclear on what crops women worked on. Besides cotton, and later sugar, there were also a large variety of vegetables and fruit produced at Angola, a portion of them being consumed by prisoners themselves. The prisoners also worked at the vegetable and fruit cannery. First installed in 1936, it was “one of the largest canning plants in the State” according to Director of Institutions Claude Harrison¹⁰¹¹. Black women also contributed to the cultivation of tobacco, grown at Angola until 1943, which was “strictly a local product. Most of it [was] grown at Camp B, cured and packed at the Women’s Camp, where it [was] mixed with a small quantity of Tennessee burley bought by the penitentiary”. Called “Pelican Tobacco”, it tasted more like “horse-dung” than cigarettes and was said to be “so strong no one can smoke it straight, so users wash it in the water, then dry it in the sun. It tastes nothing like tobacco and is only smoked as a last resort”¹⁰¹². One is left to wonder if Black women who prepared this tobacco consumed it as well. Indeed, Convict Records for the period 1901-1924 indicate that two thirds of them were tobacco users at their admission. This

¹⁰⁰⁶ “Convict Farms Doing Well”, *The Daily Picayune*, May 14, 1901.

¹⁰⁰⁷ “Sims Wisely Wonders”, *The Daily Picayune*, April 16, 1901.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Beckert, “Cotton and the US South”, 49.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan, *Unfree Workers*, 168.

¹⁰¹⁰ Follett, “The Rise and Fall of American Sugar”, 74.

¹⁰¹¹ “W.T. Mitchiner Superintendent Of Penitentiary”, *Morning Advocate*, September 10, 1942.

¹⁰¹² William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget” account of 1936, published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 16, July 11, 1953; Volume 1, no 29, October 10, 1953.

suggests a high prevalence of tobacco use among working-class Black women, the most likely use at the period being chewing tobacco rather than cigarettes.

As shown in the photograph below, Black women were subjected to close surveillance when working in the fields at Angola from a white male guard on horseback.

Figure 7.1: Angola Prison 1938, photograph by Fonville Winans



Reproduced with the permission of Fonville Photography

7.3.2 Prison washerwomen and domestic servants

In 1916, the Board of Control lamented that: “about one-half of the women are not fitted for any outdoor work under our system; in fact, not capable of doing any productive work at all”. These women were instead “employed in waiting upon and serving others in various capacities”¹⁰¹³. The costs of maintenance for the penal institution had to be kept under the limits set by the small budget appropriations made by the Louisiana Legislature. Black women’s work, particularly at the prison laundry, was crucial to this end. In addition, they were assigned to the care of their living quarters, dining room, and infirmary, where they performed daily chores. Black women did laundry for the whole penitentiary population at LSP, just like they had done in the Baton Rouge penitentiary before the Civil War¹⁰¹⁴. In the early 1940s, the laundry was still hand done although penitentiary officials were considering the economic potential of constructing a steam laundry¹⁰¹⁵. In one year, the Black women working at the laundry handled “94,202 pounds of laundry”¹⁰¹⁶. In 1944, a federal survey conducted at the institution found “a small obsolete unit” dedicated to “the cleaning of women’s clothing, hospital and staff laundry, and infrequent washing of inmate bed-clothing” while male prisoners had to wash their own garments in their quarters after working hours¹⁰¹⁷. Hygiene was indeed hard to maintain because of the limited numbers of clothes made available to each individual and the provisions made by the institution for washing them. In 1936, a male prisoner was writing:

There being no way to dry clothes which have become dampened with sweat out in the fields, workers are forced to lay them out under their bunks in the cellroom and hope they will dry during the night on the wooden floor. But this Angola climate, with a

¹⁰¹³ Source: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 19.

¹⁰¹⁴ Forret, “Before Angola”, 141.

¹⁰¹⁵ 1944 Hearings, 152.

¹⁰¹⁶ Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1943-1944, State of Louisiana, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1944, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC. Quote on page 84.

¹⁰¹⁷ Sanford and Jenkinson, *State of Louisiana: Recommendations for Reorganization of the Penitentiary System, A Survey Report by the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons and Federal Prison Industries, Inc.*, 50.

high percentage of humidity, makes the pants and jumpers feel like putting on wet bathing suits the morning after¹⁰¹⁸.

Apparently later in the 1940s or 1950s, Black women resumed the task of washing clothes and bed-clothing for all prisoners. In one instance in 1953, twenty-seven laundresses washed the uniforms of all of the 3,260 prisoners in three days, and in another, in one month “they handled 20,678 pounds of wash”. Luckily, at that point machines had replaced tubs and washboards¹⁰¹⁹. This tedious assignment came apparently with some unexpected risks: “[Captain J.M.] Wood charged [the women doing laundry for the penitentiary population] for any article of clothes lost, but that money was never turned in.” Many Black washerwomen “complained that over a period of years their meager funds, received from home, had been sequestered in this manner.” Wood claimed in his defense: “I do that to keep them from getting careless and losing things”¹⁰²⁰. Rewards for their hard work - so crucial to the penitentiary community - sometimes also came unexpectedly. For instance, one of Angola’s male prisoners named Joe was inspired by “the girls of the Laundry” to whom he dedicated his poem: “Queen of my tub, I merrily sing While the white foam rises high And sturdily wash, and rinse and wring And fasten the clothes to dry”¹⁰²¹. Another male prisoner applauded one of the Black women laundresses, Lula Mae M., “who in two years at the tub has helped to prove that cleanliness is next to Godliness even on this Angola” while Geneva J., also laundress, “asks recognition for the alleged feat of having washed 92 pounds of soiled clothes last week”¹⁰²². The filth and smell of their companions’ working clothes certainly added an extra challenge to the quantity of laundry Black women had to wash at Angola. Quantities were overwhelming to the point that the laundresses passed the following message in the prison newspaper: “Please – they plea; can’t youse guys get along on a few less clothes each week”¹⁰²³?

¹⁰¹⁸ William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget” account of 1936, published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 16, July 11, 1953.

¹⁰¹⁹ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 8, May 23, 1953; Volume 1, no. 30, October 17, 1953.

¹⁰²⁰ “Hell on Angola. Part 7: Work Goes On In The Rain”, by Sadler, *The New Orleans Item*, July 13, 1943.

¹⁰²¹ “A Poem from the Suds”, *Angola Argus*, Volume 1, no. 14, March 1, 1941 ; *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 31, October 24, 1953.

¹⁰²² *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 14, June 27, 1953; Volume 1, no. 26, September 19, 1953.

¹⁰²³ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 30, October 17, 1953.

In addition to performing agricultural labor and maintenance work, many Black women were also assigned as domestic laborers in white households at some point during their incarceration (a total of seventy-six among those admitted 1925-1935). All of them were Black. Most of the Black women caught in the “domestic carceral servitude” worked for a white family who resided on Angola grounds or did the laundry ‘for the free personnel’¹⁰²⁴. Because of the remoteness of Angola, most staff members - whose numbers grew over time - were housed inside the perimeter of the penitentiary with their wives and children. For instance, in 1944, fifty-five families occupied houses built by prisoners, comprising a total of 150-200 “free people” on the farm¹⁰²⁵. Staff were given free access to domestic laborers, who were African American men and women detained at LSP. The job was not very well-paid (for instance, camp captains received \$200 a month in the 1930s) but came with a “house, electricity, vegetables, milk, poultry and eggs, servants, and fruit”, prisoners’ labor being one among several commodities that LSP employees had at their disposal¹⁰²⁶. Around thirty different staff members had a Black woman prisoner at their disposal over the period 1925-1935 alone: captains of the various Angola camps (and not exclusively Camp D), physicians, superintendents, and others. In addition, some penitentiary officials residing outside of Angola were also entitled to the same privilege: the penitentiary surgeon and the auditor both lived in Baton Rouge and worked there at the old penitentiary, the penitentiary General Manager and the successive wardens, whose official accommodation was in the old penitentiary (until it was closed in 1932). Finally, seven women worked for Governor Huey P. Long or Governor Oscar K. Allen in the Governor’s mansion, also located in the State capital; they were probably live-in domestic workers, at least after the old Baton Rouge penitentiary closed in February 1932. All “carceral servants” were considered as “trusties”, which meant a privileged treatment in regards to “Good time” (see chapter 6).

Unfortunately, only sparse evidence can document the tasks the incarcerated performed for white penitentiary staff or officials. According to one source, “prisoners would do the cooking and

¹⁰²⁴ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 31. October 24, 1953.

¹⁰²⁵ Source: 1944 Hearings, 131. Only a few children appeared in the 1910 federal census, and less than twenty in the 1920 census. In 1958, 237 white children were living on the penal farm. Source: Census of Employees, November 12, 1958, Folder 1958, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge, LA.

¹⁰²⁶ “Hell on Angola”, *The New Orleans Item*, July 16, 1943.

cleaning inside the homes, cultivated flowers and vegetables in the yard, take care of the horses and pets”¹⁰²⁷. Some prisoners also took over part of the nursing of their guardians’ children. This was probably the case for Lodie H., who was assigned as a servant to the foreman Mr. Greely and his wife. The couple had five children under the age of sixteen during Lodie H.’s service¹⁰²⁸. The exploitation of incarcerated African American women as domestic workers on the Angola grounds and beyond fits into Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s argument about the extent in which systems of labor coercion have appropriated women’s reproductive labor, forcing them to perform “caring labor” for their very own captors¹⁰²⁹.

When assigning Black women to serve white households, penitentiary officials usually preferred to entrust those who, like Lodie H., had not disrupted white property. Because officials could acknowledge the exceptional nature of their crime, alleged murderers were deemed more trustworthy in white homes than alleged thieves, the latter being considered dishonest by nature. Indeed, among the seventy-six women admitted between 1925-1935 and serving sentences as house servants, only ten were convicted of property crimes (i.e. 13.1 percent while this category represented around one third of the Black female convictions) and all of those ten had received sentences longer than a year. Eight of the others had even received a life sentence like Lodie H. Despite the violent nature of their alleged crime, they were trusted to be around white housewives and children¹⁰³⁰. Black women worked in homes where the presence of Black men “trusties” was seen as dangerous since the proximity between white female and Black male bodies caused an irrational fear of rape to most white Southerners¹⁰³¹. This fear led to violent reactions from white staff, such as the following incident recounted in the African American press. A former prison guard captain testified that: “he had whipped prisoners at the prison himself”. Moreover, he told of an incident in which a Black male prisoner had supposedly “brushed against [his] daughter”. The former captain said that: “after he whipped the prisoner until he became exhausted, another

¹⁰²⁷ Hamilton and Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary*, 38.

¹⁰²⁸ Entry #23341, Volume 37, no. 22701-23350, 1932-1933, LSP Collection; U.S. Census 1930.

¹⁰²⁹ Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 36.

¹⁰³⁰ This also talks about the little consideration whites granted to the Black lives these women had taken. The examination of court records and newspaper accounts reveal that most homicides were indeed Black-on-Black crimes.

¹⁰³¹ Historian Robert Chase found the same “anxiety” over the use of “houseboys”, i.e. Black male domestic servants in Texas penal farms. Chase, *We Are Not Slaves*, 90.

man replaced him, then ‘I gave it to him again’”¹⁰³². The captain exercised a level of brutality against that prisoner which was disproportionate with his alleged mistake, revealing the extent of that irrational fear of bodily contact between Black men and white women. The same fear of “black on white rape” was also evident in the following exchange between Dr. Myron E. Walker, former visiting physician at Angola, and Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel and Lennox L. Moak, respectively chair and vice-chairman of the Subcommittee on penal institutions in charge of studying penal institutions, who were to report to Governor Jones before the 1944 elections. In February 1944, the subcommittee questioned Dr. Walker on the separation of the women’s camp from the rest of the penitentiary operations, which had been a long-lasting debate in Louisiana:

Rummel: “Would you recommend the separation of the women’s department from this place here, getting it somewhere else?

Walker: As it is now, it probably would be the best thing.

[..]

Walker: . . . The main reason you don’t want it [the women’s camp] here on the farm is the fact that once in a while the boys and girls get together. That is understandable, and the circumstance is undesirable. There is another thing to consider. If you get the right kind of people to come down here [as free staff], you have to make certain inducements in their favor. A lot of people don’t like male servants in their houses alone. . . .

Moak: Are they used widely as household servants for the free employees?

Walker: Not right now. It was discontinued a few months ago. It was discontinued because one or two of the girls were caught hob-nobbing with the boys¹⁰³³.

The penitentiary’s need to attract and retain qualified white staff and the resultant need of white staff for Black female domestic laborers, attested by Dr. Walker’s statement, might have played some role in maintaining female State prisoners in Louisiana at Angola until the creation of a female penitentiary in 1961¹⁰³⁴. Incidents such as the murders of Dr. Ehlert’s wife and of Captain Spillman’s wife certainly argued against the presence of Black male “trusties” in white homes, and in favor of Black women who were perceived as less menacing¹⁰³⁵. Conversely, Black

¹⁰³² “Prison Probe Reveals Negro Inmates Victims of Brutality”, *The Louisiana Weekly*, March 24, 1951.

¹⁰³³ 1944 Hearings, 79, 80.

¹⁰³⁴ First managed by the Angola warden, St-Gabriel became an independent institution after a few years of operation and is still known today under the name Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW). See conclusion.

¹⁰³⁵ For a detailed account of the incidents, see: “Information on Tragedy at Angola State Farm Received”, *State Times Advocate*, November 12, 1913; “Convict Murders Wife of Doctor; Then Kills Self”, *The Times-Picayune*, November 12, 1913; “Mrs. Ehlert Buried”, *The Times-Picayune*, November 13 1913; “Coroner’s Inquest on Angola Tragedy”, *The Times-Democrat*, November 13, 1913; “Mrs. Ehlert Murdered at Angola”, *The True Democrat*, November 15, 1913; “Posse Beats Woods for Killer of Angola Camp Captain’s Wife”, *The Times*, October 21, 1948.

women's proximity to white men, women and children in their homes entailed risks for the prisoners themselves, which did not seem to worry LSP officials. Indeed, "domestic carceral servitude" did not constitute a protective labor category for Black women prisoners. It is unlikely that being assigned to white homes spared Black women from the brutality used daily at LSP during Jim Crow to "discipline" prisoners, in particular African Americans. Under the control of others (i.e. other staff or their housewives) than their camp captain who kept track of the lashes he administered himself, their victimization probably stayed off the record. One exception is a case of "insubordination" sanctioned by fifteen lashes administered in October 1930 by the captain of the receiving station in Baton Rouge to Virginia H., his personal cook (a professional cook who did all "her time" at his service, without actually going to Angola)¹⁰³⁶. Although there is no direct archival evidence of sexual violence against the African American women at Angola who performed domestic labor in white homes, their isolation from the other women incarcerated during the day made them vulnerable to it, as much as domestic workers in the "free" world were susceptible to victimization by their white employers¹⁰³⁷. In 1943, an ex-prisoner pointed to the occurrence of violence and sexual violence against the "women [...] used as house servants and maids by various penitentiary officials and employees scattered all over Angola" when he made this vague suggestion: "The practice has been abused in more ways than one"¹⁰³⁸. When working at LSP for white families, Black women also encountered the same types of risks than "house slaves" before them¹⁰³⁹. It is noteworthy that, also like "house slaves" before them, Black women assigned to "domestic carceral servitude" were more likely to be light-skinned than the rest of the prisoners (30.2 percent compared to 22.2 percent), suggesting that skin tone could have had something to do with ranking in Angola's prisoners' hierarchies.

See also Anne Butler Hamilton and C. Murray Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary*, 37-47; Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 124-140.

¹⁰³⁶ Entry #18590, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929, LSP Collection.

¹⁰³⁷ Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance", in Hine, *Hine Sight*.

¹⁰³⁸ "Blueprint for New Angola", *The New Orleans Item*, Dec 31, 1943 (by Sadler, a former white male prisoner).

¹⁰³⁹ Working in the slaveholder's home could bring a variety of material advantages over field work: access to better food, clothing and housing, as well as a lesser exposure to disease, heat exhaustion, snake bites, or other injuries that constituted daily risks in the fields. These privileges came at a price, as bondwomen working in white homes were particularly exposed to sexual violence and sexual exploitation. Berry, *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe*, 43-44.

7.3.1 Labor assignments as a marker of racial difference

Here, thinking about labor assignment through the lens of intersectionality proves useful, as comparisons between white and Black women's assigned tasks can shed light on these hierarchies. For instance, only one white woman (and she was in her forties, a Madam, and a recidivist) performed field work while incarcerated, which suggests that LSP officials deemed agricultural labor improper for white women. Physical work was deemed more appropriate for Black men and women, as it had been during slavery. Through hard manual labor, LSP operated to accentuate Black women's virilization and their simultaneous dehumanization, while it preserved white women's womanhood by assigning them to the tailor shop and the feminine task of sewing¹⁰⁴⁰. Despite the repetitive nature of the labor, sewing "stripes" (prison uniforms), sheets and other articles destined for use by prisoners was less physically taxing, and therefore deemed more appropriate for white women. Apart from sewing for all LSP prisoners, white women did not contribute to the maintenance of the prison as a whole, even though some of them performed daily chores in their own (white) living quarters. In January 1955, a first incarcerated white woman was made bookkeeper, an assignment that had been reserved until then for white male prisoners. By the end of 1956, sixteen of the twenty-four white incarcerated women were secretaries, stenographers, and clerks, while only five Black women worked in the mail room¹⁰⁴¹.

When, in the fall of 1958, Charlotte Mae Richardson surveyed Angola's female population, she found similar dichotomies between white women's labor assignments and Black women's¹⁰⁴². The table below summarizes Richardson's findings. Although women had more diverse

¹⁰⁴⁰ Dorlin, "De l'usage épistémologique et politique des catégories de 'sexe' et de 'race' dans les études sur le genre", 100–101.

¹⁰⁴¹ Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, "Bad Girls, Convict Women, Part 2: 1901-1950", 38.

¹⁰⁴² These dichotomies persist to the present day. According to testimonials from Black women incarcerated in Louisiana, white women work in "prestigious jobs" such as the dining hall but do not perform agricultural work as their Black counterparts. See: American Civil Liberties Union and the University of Chicago Law School Global Human Rights Clinic, "Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers", 2022.

occupations in the late 1950s than before, and Black women had also started working in some spaces like the tailor shop and the prison administration, the diversification had mostly benefitted white women who continued to receive better assignments, while Black women were still assigned most manual and menial labor:

There is no definite or comprehensive classification system for the female inmates¹⁰⁴³. Variation in jobs for them are few. If the inmate is white, neat, has a high school education, and secretarial ability or noticeable talent in clerical fields, she is placed in the administration building of the prison as a secretary, typist, file clerk, or posting clerk. If the inmate is Negro and shows the same qualifications, she is placed in the

¹⁰⁴³ Since 1901 and until the 1950s, LSP classification consisted of four categories of prisoners. "Immediately upon taking charge we inaugurated a system of physical examination and classification of the prisoners, in order that each might be assigned to work according to his strength. [...] "First class shall comprise of all men of sound physical health, between the ages of 20 and 50 years, of 140 pounds weight or more, and who have been accustomed to physical labor. "Second class shall comprise all men of sound physical health, who are slightly under or over the age limits of class 1, or who are of less than 140 pounds weight, or who have not been accustomed to hard outdoor labor. "Third class shall comprise of all old men and boys, all men suffering from any impairment of health of not sufficient severity to confine them to the hospital, and all healthy female prisoners. "Fourth class shall comprise all sick prisoners who should be in the hospital and under physicians' care. [...] The second and third class are sent to the farms and utilized for lighter work." Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on pages 12-13.

According to Joseph Mouledous, in the 1950s, "the Louisiana State Penitentiary's classification program was styled along the lines of classification in the federal prison system, and incorporated the essential features of classification as stated in the Manual of Correctional Standards [published by the American Prison Association]. A professional staff existed; case histories were constructed on all newly admitted inmates (admission summaries containing occupational history and vocational training, based on questionnaires sent to prior employers and institutions in an attempt to verify the inmate's claims. Furthermore, the family questionnaire contains a section on employment history); an Initial Classification Committee assigned new inmates to custodial classes, dormitories, and jobs, at weekly meetings". Mouledous, "Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System", 155-156, 172.

"As a result, inmates with proven occupational skills are generally assured a job, regardless of age, crime, offender class, length of sentence, or social background. There are exceptions, the most important being race. Negroes are generally excluded from such jobs as auto mechanic, electrician and clerk typist. When an employer needs a skilled worker and can't find him among the white inmates, he will accept a Negro. The best example known to the writer is a Negro multiple offender, who was a surgical nurse to the medical officer. Mouledous, "Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System", 151.

"the [classification] committee members made their decisions on the basis of the impressions they received of the inmate, which impressions were structured by their personal experiences and 'common sense' knowledge of criminals. For example, an illiterate Negro of obvious rural background incarcerated for a crime of violence against a member of his own race, would not be considered to be a security problem and classification to minimum (trusty) custody was normal procedure. In a similar manner, New Orleans narcotic criminals were judged to be security risks and could expect medium (big stripe) classification". Mouledous, "Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System", 181.

"official committee assignments were often ignored, bypassed and violated. A camp captain of one of the Negro camps remarked to the writer that he wanted a newly-admitted inmate, who was being returned to the institution as a second offender less than two years after his discharge, made a trusty so that he could use him in his old job of camp clerk. When questioned if he wanted the man assigned to that specific job and to his camp, the captain replied that it didn't make any difference where he was assigned as long as he was made trusty. He knew that he could have him informally transferred from another camp and job by simply making a personal request of that captain". Mouledous, "Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System", 186.

mail room or the package room. Other Negro girls who are neat, have janitress experience, and know how to conduct themselves in the office situation, work as orderlies in the administration building. One white inmate with secretarial experience is assigned to the administrative office of the women's camp. Other inmates are placed, according to personal requests and requisitions of the free personnel, in the following jobs: both white and colored in the tailor shop, in the dormitories as orderlies, and in the yard; and one colored in the kitchen and laundry¹⁰⁴⁴.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Richardson, "Women in Prison", 42-43.

Table 7.2: Distribution of women according to labor assignments (women present in the Fall 1958)

Task assigned	Black women	white women	Total women
Secretaries in the prison administration building	0	5	5
Clerks in the prison administration building	6	7	13
Workers in the tailor shop	22	6	28
Operator of the camp store (commissary)	0	1	1
Principal of inmate school	0	1	1
Secretary for the women's camp	0	1	1
Classification clerk	0	1	1
Orderlies in the dormitories	4	3	7
Orderlies in the women's administration building	2	0	2
Orderlies in the prison administration building	3	0	3
Attendant in white dining hall	0	1	1
Yard crew	2	2	4
Kitchen crew	5	0	5
Camp seamstress	0	1	1
Wash-house girl	1	0	1
Workers in the laundry	19	0	19

Source: Richardson, "Women in Prison: A Study of Social Relationships", 62.

As the idea of prisoners' rehabilitation gained ground in Louisiana, LSP introduced industries at Angola in order to diversify labor assignments and allegedly to give prisoners the opportunity to

learn a trade so they could find better employment when leaving the penitentiary. For instance, the production of license plates for cars started at Angola in 1932, a practice that continues to the present-day with an interruption during World War II¹⁰⁴⁵. In line with LSP's segregation policy, this innovation only benefited white male prisoners, as the authorities probably continued to believe that "with the preponderance of negro labor such manufacturing would be almost out of question in this State"¹⁰⁴⁶. In 1944, federal experts who surveyed the custodial and labor operations at Angola recommended that only Black prisoners be assigned to agricultural work, while white prisoners and only a few African Americans could have access to industrial occupations¹⁰⁴⁷. In 1948, James M. Smith, who had formerly been convicted of embezzlement as president of Louisiana State University and sent as a prisoner to Angola, was made LSP Director of rehabilitation. Smith created new clerical positions for prisoners, which, like industrial positions, were reserved to incarcerated white men.

The drudgery of the tasks was likely to vary according to the assignment. Even if the logic of the assignments does not appear totally clear in the sources, some elements suggest that white women were given preferential treatment, whereas Black women were assigned to repetitive and tedious tasks, as was also the case in other Southern carceral spaces. Ida Ann Harper, who conducted a sociological study during Jim Crow at Julia Tutwiler, a woman's correctional institution in Alabama, observed that "white inmates feel socially superior" because of this hierarchy established in the prison through labor and otherwise: "White inmates express the feeling of superiority over Negro inmates by not wanting to do any work other than their tasks that would directly contribute to the livelihood of the Negro inmates"¹⁰⁴⁸.

A Black prisoner complained of the hierarchy between white and Black women incarcerated in a letter to the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People (NAACP) where he

¹⁰⁴⁵ Clint Smith underlines "the cruel irony of people so restricted in their own movements creating something that facilitated mobility for so many others". Smith, *How the Word Is Passed*, 90.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Source: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 20.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Sanford and Jenkinson, *State of Louisiana: Recommendations for Reorganization of the Penitentiary System, A Survey Report by the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons and Federal Prison Industries, Inc.*, 24-25.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Harper, "A Study of the 'Natural Groups' within a Woman's Correctional Institution", 59-60.

explained how this hierarchy was enacted in the Florida prison camp (Raiford) where he was detained:

the white wemon dont have to do nothing but sit down all day and char and tell them colored wemon how they wont them to cook they meles and wash they cloth, then to the colored wemon have to work in rain and water in the fields all day sick or well them come in and serve the white wemon all of this is backed up by the Captin P.D. Frenser.

It is realey bad here for the colored men & wemon they are inhuman treated all kinds of ways.

The white wemon can come to the hall games but the colored wemon cant¹⁰⁴⁹.

At Angola, white women were not given assignments where they would work for their Black counterparts. Conversely, they were sometimes given assignments where they would have a position of authority over their Black counterparts, as was the case for Lena G. who was a laundry forewoman before she was assigned to supervise cannery operations¹⁰⁵⁰.

Not all assignments were equivalent at LSP, as it was the case in other carceral settings. Historian Robert Chase stated that Texas penal farms coerced prisoners into a range of different ranking work assignments, ordered along a meaningful hierarchy: “Prisoners understood how promotion and demotion of job assignment meant all the difference in how they might experience the pain of their incarceration”¹⁰⁵¹. LSP sources do not provide information as to the motives for promotion, but reveal that demotions could happen following infringements of the penitentiary rules. The lowest job in the LSP hierarchy was conceivably levee and road work, which was extremely hard on Black men’s bodies. For Black women, the lowest occupation was farm work, although the needs of the institution for field hands meant that most of these Black women would in fact be forced to do agricultural tasks during their incarceration, regardless of their compliance with rules¹⁰⁵². Ida McC.’s case is exceptional, as she had spent four years as an assistant hospital steward before she was sent to the fields for the remaining of her sentence. However, her record does not provide an explanation for this demotion. For white women, returning to the bottom

¹⁰⁴⁹ Willis James to Walter White, 25 September 1939, folder 001530-016-0405, Legal File: Crime Prison Camps (1939), Papers of the NAACP, Part 08: Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, 1910-1955, Series B: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1940-1955, Group II, Series B.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Entry #19688, Volume 32, no. 19451-20100, 1930, LSP Collection.

¹⁰⁵¹ Chase, *We Are Not Slaves*, 60.

¹⁰⁵² Mouledous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System”, 177.

position meant returning to the sewing machine. For instance, in August 1933, Lennie S.M., was “swung from clerk & cook” and assigned to the tailor shop for attempting to escape¹⁰⁵³.

LSP enacted racial hierarchies among prisoners through labor assignments that reproduced hierarchies existing outside of the penitentiary-plantation, in a world where African American women occupied the lowest positions on the job market. In Jim Crow Louisiana, Black women’s work was grossly underpaid, which resulted in financial distress for many. For instance, a survey of labor conditions for sharecroppers conducted in Concordia Parish, La., by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in October 1937 found out that intermittent employment and low wage rates combined into meager annual earnings that were insufficient to improve material conditions¹⁰⁵⁴:

A 1937 Women's Bureau report noted that the female cotton pickers of Concordia Parish, Louisiana, earned a total of \$41.67 annually; most found, or accepted, gainful employment for less than ninety days each year. Those who continued to labor as sharecroppers of course received only a ramshackle room and meager board, but virtually nothing in cash¹⁰⁵⁵.

Black women’s work opportunities changed little until the end of the 1950s, with household labor being their most frequent occupation. At a very young age, often at age seven, Black girls were prepared to seek paid employment to contribute to family needs, “by their preteen years many girls had gone to work in private homes for white families”¹⁰⁵⁶. In 1900, more than half of African American women worked as domestic servants¹⁰⁵⁷. In 1910, 21 percent of Black women were gainfully employed in the U.S. worked as servants and 16 percent as laundresses. Most of the others were agricultural workers¹⁰⁵⁸. World War I led to some breakthrough for Black women in industrial positions left vacant by white women who had climbed the employment ladder. However, after WW1 these gains were mostly lost and employment opportunities were as limited

¹⁰⁵³ Entry #17812, Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928; Entry #22468, Volume 36, no. 22051-22699, 1932, LSP Collection.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Quoted in: United States. Women's Bureau and Brown, Jean Collier. *The Negro Woman Worker: Women's Bureau Bulletin, No. 165*. <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/5438> Accessed on May 17, 2022.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 202.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 79.

¹⁰⁵⁷ US Census quoted by: Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 81.

¹⁰⁵⁸ United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population*, pp. 521-22. Quoted by Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 368.

as they had been before the conflict¹⁰⁵⁹. According to a 1918 Louisiana survey, Black women working in the “industries” were found at the time “most frequently in laundries, the kitchens of hotels and restaurants, and a few miscellaneous shops such as nut and cotton pickeries”. Among the findings of this field study were the insufficient wages granted to women, especially to minors and working mothers, which led the authors to underline the necessity of improving not only their wages, but also their work hours and other conditions¹⁰⁶⁰. In the Jim Crow South, the tobacco industry was one of the rare industries employing Black women: in 1910, 63 percent of Black women’s industrial positions were in this sector, although they occupied a greater range of industrial positions during World War I, from which many were dismissed after the conflict. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, “they have held a monopoly of the heavy and dusty labor since the institution of the factory method of rehandling tobacco”¹⁰⁶¹. For instance, Black women worked in stemmery departments where their work consisted of removing the stem from the leaf and of getting the tobacco ready for the various processes of manufacture¹⁰⁶². By contrast, in the same industry, young white women, often of immigrant background, most often performed less demanding tasks like packing cigarettes.

According to the 1930 census, three in five Black women reported their usual occupation as in domestic and personal service (i.e. 1,150,000 including 600,000 in private homes). The same year, 270,000 Black women were reported as working as self-employed laundresses and 50,000 as commercial laundry operatives. In 1930, half a million Black women worked in agriculture in the U.S. (seven in eight in seven Southern states), one-fourth of whom were wage workers and

¹⁰⁵⁹ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 148.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Conditions of Women’s Labor in Louisiana, New Orleans and Louisiana Industrial Survey*, Report by Women in Industry Committee, Council of National Defense, New Orleans Division and Louisiana State Division, New Orleans, 1919. Quote on p. 7. The survey was conducted in 1918 in New Orleans and sixteen other Louisiana cities and villages by the Women in Industry Committee, documenting a sample of about 12,000 wage-working women, 85% of them white. The survey excluded “domestics in homes” or boarding houses, as well as home employment (“sweat shops”) or “the social evil among workers”, i.e. the sex trade.

¹⁰⁶¹ United States. Women’s Bureau, Shields, Emma L and United States. Department of Labor. Division of Negro Economics. *Negro Women in Industry: Women’s Bureau Bulletin*, No. 20. <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/5344> Accessed on May 17, 2022.

¹⁰⁶² United States. Women’s Bureau and Brown, Jean Collier. *The Negro Woman Worker: Women’s Bureau Bulletin*, No. 165. <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/5438> Accessed on May 17, 2022.

three-fifths unpaid family workers¹⁰⁶³. The Great Depression saw the economy shrink, with white families going without domestic help, which impacted Black women in the domestic service. Black women's participation in the national labor force dropped from 42 percent in 1930 to 37.8 percent in 1940, because of their diminished work opportunities due to the Great Depression¹⁰⁶⁴. Furthermore, domestic service and farming were excluded from federal legislation passed in the 1930s in the context of the New Deal, leaving African Americans without the protection granted to other workers: minimum wage, social security, and disability benefits¹⁰⁶⁵.

All the same, Black women's participation in the labor force was higher nationally than white women's. In addition, "even white women with relative little wealth hired black women as household laborers, thereby establishing a racial hierarchy through women's work, and maintaining a form of white privilege"¹⁰⁶⁶. In 1930, two in five Black women worked for their living, in contrast with one in five white women¹⁰⁶⁷. With a slow and steady increase of white women on the work force, this gap reduced over the years: in 1952, 44.2 percent of Black women compared to 32.7 percent of white women were working or seeking work. According to federal censuses, in 1940 non-white women (95 percent being Black) were working predominantly in service industries, some were still working in agriculture and very few in wholesale and retail trade or in manufacturing. In 1950, they had somehow diversified but were still mostly excluded from sectors where white women were employed (see Appendix H). Those aggregated employment numbers do not necessarily reflect the situation in Louisiana, as the state's demographics had changed: the Second Great Migration during and after World War II was heavily composed of African Americans seeking industrial employment opportunities outside the region. As a result, the proportion of all employed Black people working in the South fell from three-fourths to two-thirds over the decade. By 1952, work in domestic and personal service still

¹⁰⁶³ United States. Women's Bureau and Brown, Jean Collier. *The Negro Woman Worker: Women's Bureau Bulletin, No. 165*. <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/5438> Accessed on May 17, 2022.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 197.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 81–82.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 4.

¹⁰⁶⁷ United States. Women's Bureau and Brown, Jean Collier. *The Negro Woman Worker: Women's Bureau Bulletin, No. 165*. <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/5438> Accessed on May 17, 2022.

comprised more than half of the total jobs of all employed Black women nationally. The cumulative effects of reduced job opportunities and occupations with lower levels of job stability gave rise to sharp income inequalities: in 1950, the median money income for non-white families was \$1,869, a total that represented just 54.3 percent of white families' income¹⁰⁶⁸. In March 1964, 37.4 percent of Black women were private household workers and 25.9 percent were service workers outside the home. Moreover, non-white women's earnings in 1964 were only 62 percent of those of non-white men and 69 percent of those of white women¹⁰⁶⁹. Despite such inequities and discrimination, Black women had some leeway in the "outside world" "to transform the workplace and make it more responsive to their own and their households' needs", for instance by refusing live-in positions or by preferring to take in clothes to wash at home than working in somebody else's home¹⁰⁷⁰.

Before their incarceration at Angola, Black women had occupations reflecting the trends discussed above. Moreover, among female prisoners, Black women's participation in the labor force prior incarceration was higher than white women's, which also reflects national trends. As expected, their most prominent occupational categories were related to domestic labor, such as cooks, house workers, washwomen and housekeepers, especially among Black women¹⁰⁷¹. According to evidence from court records, some participated in the survival economy, for instance doing sex work, although this is not the occupation they declared to the authorities. Significant numbers of Black women admitted at LSP over the period 1901-1935 were farm laborers, while no white woman was. A portion of white women occupied clerical positions, whereas not a single Black woman did. Not many women of either races occupied so-called "skilled" positions, such as seamstresses, school teachers or clerical work, although white women were more represented in those professions than Black ones. Finally, the number of women

¹⁰⁶⁸ Bedell, *Income of Negro Workers, 1940-52*.

¹⁰⁶⁹ United States. Women's Bureau. *Negro Women in the Population and In the Labor Force*. <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/300> Accessed on May 17, 2022.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 323; Clark-Lewis, *Living in, Living out*.

¹⁰⁷¹ Numbers of washwomen & laundresses in penitentiary reports from 1901 to 1917 were aggregated for a total of 20 women (the Angola Women's Database counted 16 for the same period). Numbers of house girls, house servants, servants, & housekeepers in penitentiary reports from 1901 to 1917 were aggregated for a total of 316 women (the Angola Women's Database counted 315 for the same period, including cooks who were not counted apart in the reports).

without occupation outside of their household was very low, reflecting the reality that most were contributing by their wages to their family's economic survival¹⁰⁷².

Table 7.3: Number and percentage of women per race by occupation (1901-1935)

Occupation	Black women		white women	
	Number	%	Number	%
clerical work	0	0.0%	10	10.8%
cook	192	19.9%	1	1.1%
farm work	115	11.9%	0	0.0%
house work	481	49.9%	27	29.0%
housekeeper	21	2.2%	16	17.2%
housewife	21	2.2%	15	16.1%
laborer	39	4.0%	3	3.2%
nurse	7	0.7%	2	2.2%
restaurant work	7	0.7%	7	7.5%
school teacher	5	0.5%	1	1.1%
seamstress	12	1.2%	4	4.3%
washwoman	53	5.5%	0	0.0%
other	3	0.3%	5	5.4%
no occupation	2	0.2%	2	2.2%
not available	5	0.5%	0	0.0%
Total	963	100.0%	93	100.0%

Source: Angola Women's Database

Among Black women admitted at LSP, there were not very significant variations by decade in terms of the preponderance of domestic labor. Aggregating the four occupation categories 'cook', 'house work', 'housekeeper' and 'washwoman' allows to take into account potential overlaps between categories; for instance, if the admission clerk decided to label cooks as 'house work' instead of 'cooks' in admission registers. Domestic labor represented between 71.1 and 84.5 percent of Black female admissions (see Table I.1 in Appendix I for details). When examining Black women admitted to LSP by birth cohort, it appears that younger Black women were more likely to perform domestic labor than the older generations and less likely to perform farm labor, which might be explained by the progressive decrease of the Louisiana rural

¹⁰⁷² Harley, "For the Good of Family and Race", 342.

population and the increasing urbanization (see Table I.2 in Appendix I for more details). A breakdown of Black women's occupation per alleged crime shows that domestic laborers represented a larger proportion among women convicted of property crimes (82 percent) than among women convicted of crimes against persons (73.4 percent), pointing towards cases of property offenses involving employers¹⁰⁷³. No aggregated data on the occupations of women admitted to LSP after 1935 is available until the late 1950s, and the following table shows that domestic service was still dominant among incarcerated African Americans, even as some sectors were open to white women while excluding Black women.

Table 7.4: Women's admissions for years 1956-1960, by race, and by most recent occupation before incarceration

	Black women		white women	
most recent occupation	#	%	#	%
service and domestic	107	69.5%	28	34.6%
clerical and sales	3	1.9%	31	38.3%
not in labor force	18	11.7%	16	19.8%
professional and managerial	7	4.5%	3	3.7%
craftsmen, foremen and kindred	0	0.0%	1	1.2%
operatives and kindred	12	7.8%	0	0.0%
farmers and farm laborers	3	1.9%	1	1.2%
laborers	3	1.9%	1	1.2%
unknown	1	0.6%	0	0.0%
total	154		81	

Source: Louisiana Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1956-57; Louisiana Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1957-58, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888s, LARC; Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1958-59, Call Number LaRm HV86.L852, Louisiana Room, University of Louisiana in Lafayette; Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1959-60, Call Number HV86.L852, LLMVC.

Describing prisoners as “depraved”, “ignorant”, and “unskilled” was convenient in masking the profits derived from their labor in the penitentiary. Despite labelling prisoners as “unskilled,” and women in particular as mostly “non productive”, penitentiary officials took advantage of the work experiences and skills the prisoners had acquired before their incarceration. Whether in farming, domestic service or in various manual occupations, their experiences and skills proved

¹⁰⁷³ See Appendix I for a detailed table of the percentage of black women by occupation per alleged crime (table I.3).

useful in executing the tasks they were assigned during their captivity. Criminality was used to justify forcing convicted Black and white men and women to work for no pay¹⁰⁷⁴. In addition, as discussed above, race and gender served to determine individuals' assignments in the penitentiary. As discussed in the following section, this discourse also helped justify the coercive means employed to extract this labor¹⁰⁷⁵. Prison labor was "the critical instrument to achieve carceral discipline and order social privilege and power"¹⁰⁷⁶. Furthermore, race and gender determined the nature of the punishment for those who voluntarily refused to or who could not execute their tasks as their guardians expected. Punishment records reveal even more than this: they show how violence was instrumental in extracting labor from "unwilling workers", and also demonstrate how women's resistance took place during labor hours, with prisoners even sometimes resorting to using working tools as instruments of revolt against penitentiary rules¹⁰⁷⁷.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Angola prisoners were not paid for their labor during the longest part of Jim Crow. Despite recommendations from early penologists like Dr. Hastings H. Hart (who proposed that prisoners would be required to send their prison earnings to their families), U.S. penitentiaries were slow to implement prison wages for the incarcerated. Source: Federal Penal Institutions, Special Committee on Federal, Penal and Reformatory Institutions, *Hearings 70th Congress* 1928-1929.

A federal Commission deplored that: "wages either have not been paid in our prisons or if paid have, with very few exceptions, been of negligible significance. Existing wage payments have been made still more negligible by a system of fining prisoners for violation of prison rules". Source: Wickersham Commission Quoted by Wilson, *Forced Labor in the United States*, 51.

At LSP, an Incentive Pay Plan was implemented only in 1957, ranking from two to five cents an hour depending on the position, as well as the individual's "attitude and quality of his work as shown on his daily performance record, monthly evaluation reports submitted by his living quarters officer, doctor's reports of feigned illness and disciplinary reports". Source: "Incentive Pay Plan", undated, Folder 1956, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. A 1957 study conducted in thirty-three States reported a daily rate of payment ranging from 4 cents to \$1.30 for prison labor. Source: National Council on Crime and Delinquency, "Corrections in the United States". Paid labor in prison also continues to be an issue today for men and women incarcerated in Louisiana who can expect to be paid only between four cents and a dollar an hour. Source: Prison Policy Initiative, "How Much Do Incarcerated People Earn in Each State?" <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2017/04/10/wages/> Accessed May 21, 2021.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan, *Unfree Workers*, 88-89.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Chase, *We Are Not Slaves*, 62.

¹⁰⁷⁷ The expression "unwilling workers" was used by Warden Victor Walker to describe Angola prisoners. Source: Transcripts, October 1960 & March 1961, State Penitentiary Investigations, folder 34, Collection P1981-497, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

7.4 Unwilling workers and the use of violence

The use of violence to obtain productivity from coerced laborers – also a feature of the slave system - has been described in all prisoners’ accounts of Angola during Jim Crow¹⁰⁷⁸. Even if most of these accounts came from male prisoners, it is plausible to assume that the climate of extreme violence they described was also prevalent in the female quarters. As one male prisoner described, prisoners were required to work under pressure and a refusal to work was punishable by the lash:

Lots of times we had to run all the way to the section we was working, convict guards yelling and cursing all the way. If we slowed down, they’d ride over us with horses and sometimes club us with shotguns. Half the time we were so worn out and dog-tired that we almost couldn’t work when we got to the fields¹⁰⁷⁹.

Field work at Angola rhymed with the brutality from captains and foremen who were armed and in control of other human beings over whom they had lethal power:

a common practice was to place each man on a row of cane, cotton, or some other crop that required weeding, harvesting, etc. The job would then begin like a footrace: fifty or more men each with his own row to work and the last five to reach the far end of the row would be whipped¹⁰⁸⁰.

The press reported that ten thousands floggings of prisoners were recorded at LSP between 1929 and 1940¹⁰⁸¹. This number could be an underestimate, according to a former Angola prisoner who claimed that “where 15 lashes was the stated whipping, it is safe to assume that three times that number were administered”, explaining that “perhaps a latent spark of shame caused the officials to report the lesser number”¹⁰⁸². Field work was done in extreme conditions, with long hours, little water and almost no time to rest. Never-ending workdays resulted in prisoners’ exhaustion,

¹⁰⁷⁸ The lash was used to “train” the enslaved in the same logic that animals have to be trained, the stimulation of the lash being perceived as necessary to obtain labor. Oudin-Bastide, *Travail, capitalisme et société esclavagiste: Guadeloupe, Martinique (XVII-XIX siècle)*, 243.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Prisoner’s interview, quoted in: LeBlanc, “Selected Limitations on the Organization of Treatment in a ‘Modern’ Prison”, 32; See also: Benton and Ballou, *Where Do I Go from Here?*

¹⁰⁸⁰ Mouledous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System”, 85–86.

¹⁰⁸¹ “Blood Took Penitentiary ‘Out of Red,’ Records Show”, *The Times-Picayune*, May 11, 1941.

¹⁰⁸² “Hell on Angola”, by Sadler, *The New Orleans Item*, July 8, 1943.

and LSP officials considered exhaustion as desirable because it meant less disruptions to deal with: “A well worked prisoner will have little time to promote evil plans and connive against fellow prisoners and the State. If well worked he will seek rest rather than trouble”¹⁰⁸³. Unsurprisingly, some prisoners could not resist these extreme conditions, and several died from exhaustion, heat and sunstroke. In August 1935, thirteen Black men were sick from the heat and six of them died the same day, an event that LSP officials dared to call “a mystery” despite working conditions not being adjusted to Louisiana summer heat, well above 100 Fahrenheit that August¹⁰⁸⁴. In fact, the only surviving volume of death records show that death by sunstroke or heat exhaustion occurred every year except two between 1929 and 1939¹⁰⁸⁵. The brutality seemed ingrained in Angola’s culture, fueled by the fact that several persons who had worked for the lessee at the end of the nineteenth century continued supervising the prisoners’ coerced labor for LSP, and as historian Mark Carleton suggested, it is doubtful that they had changed their methods when changing employers¹⁰⁸⁶. Several Angola staff members remained employed on the penitentiary-plantation during several decades, or had relatives and descendants work on Angola as well, perpetuating the culture of brutality, and at times resisting changes that wardens or general managers tried to implement. Former LSP staff and sociology student Joseph Mouledous went as far as describing some of LSP staff as “prejudiced ‘red-neck’ farmers and French speaking ‘cajuns’” and “semi-literate, ‘poor-white’ prison officials [who] lived an idyllic life which mimicked that of the passing plantation aristocracy”¹⁰⁸⁷. Carleton’s argument was that staff was a recurring problem at Angola:

That brutality was never wholly eliminated, that in fact brutal methods of coercing prisoners to work harder comprised the standard rather than the exceptional procedure at Angola before 1952, was a perennial and direct consequence of the kind of

¹⁰⁸³ Special Report, Joint Legislative Committee on Louisiana State Penitentiary, 31 May 1958, Collection P1993-164, Department of Corrections Publications, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. Quote on page 4.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 15.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Death Report, Volume 21, 1928-1948, LSP Collection.

According to recent testimonials from formerly incarcerated farm workers at Angola, some prisoners collapse from exhaustion or dehydration while working in the fields. In addition, if suspected of “faking” by correctional officers, they are either sent to solitary or left lying in the fields. Source: American Civil Liberties Union and the University of Chicago Law School Global Human Rights Clinic, “Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers”, 2022.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, chap. 4.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Mouledous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System”, 80, 136. Mouledous served from 1957 to 1961 as a classification officer and assistant director of the Division of Probation and Parole.

personnel whom the system employed. Well into the 1950s the bulk of Angola's employed custodial force was composed of the same elements that had been with the system since the days of lessee James [...]. This unprofessional custodial staff, recruited from the lower class of Louisiana's rural dwellers, was probably the most decisive factor in perpetuation of traditional brutality at Angola, especially against black convicts¹⁰⁸⁸.

This culture was not confined to Angola and was present in other carceral settings throughout the South. For instance, musicologist Alan Lomax described Parchman, the Mississippi penal farm, as follow after his visit in the early 1930s:

the state prisons of the South in many ways resembled concentration camps, both in the way they treated blacks and in their intimidating effect on the black community ... The horrid shadow of this remorseless system, in which so many men disappeared, lay over the whole South, carrying a threat that has not entirely vanished ... The prisoners rose in the black hours of the morning and ran, at gun point, all the way to the fields, sometimes a mile or more, their guards galloping behind on horse back. At work they were divided into squads, with the swiftest worker in the lead. The others were required to keep pace with him, and anyone who did not keep up, no matter what the reason, was sure of severe punishment. I met one old-timer, respectfully nicknamed 'the River-Ruler' because he'd been the leader of the number-one gang on the number-one farm in the penitentiary for twenty years. The River-Ruler's feet had turned into bags of pulpy bones from the long years of pounding the earth of the penitentiary fields. In the words of the song, he had run and walked 'till his feet got to rollin, just like a wheel' ... Everywhere we heard of men working till they dropped dead or burnt out with sunstroke. 'Knocking a Joe,' or self-mutilation, was one way out. The sight of a one-legged or one-armed man who had chopped off his own foot or hand with an ax or a hoe was a common one.

Lomax recorded the following song near Tunica, Mississippi, which encapsulates the physical violence that many prisoners have met at Angola and Parchman: "In the South, when you do anything that's wrong, (2x) They'll sho put you down on the county farm. They'll put you under a man called Captain Jack, (2x) Who'll write his name up and down your back"¹⁰⁸⁹. Citing the example of Texas, journalist Shane Bauer echoes Lomax's account of Parchman prisoners mutilating themselves to resist working conditions: "From 1932 to 1951 there were nearly nine hundred recorded cases of self-mutilations in Texas prisons"¹⁰⁹⁰. Texas prisoners commonly

¹⁰⁸⁸ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 137–38.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Alan Lomax, quoted in Woods, *Development Arrested*, 129; Historian Ethan Blue describes work songs as another form of resistance and survival strategy from Black prisoners to coerced labor on penal farms. See: Blue, *Doing Time in the Depression*, 91–95, 98.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Bauer, *American Prison*, 170.

employed the cutting of the Achilles tendons to undermine prison regime and reputation all the while reclaiming the control over their bodies¹⁰⁹¹. It was also this method that thirty-seven white men incarcerated at Angola used to protest detention conditions in February 1951. This event, which became known as “the heel slashing incident” and prompted the press to label Angola “America’s Worst Prison”, would eventually lead to long-due reforms in the institution¹⁰⁹². In many prisons across the country, prisoners’ strikes broke out in protest against work conditions and brutality¹⁰⁹³. These movements continued to repeat over time, particularly in the 1970s¹⁰⁹⁴.

Simply because of their much smaller numbers in prisons, women were less likely to engage in spectacular riots as the men were. Nevertheless, there were instances where women did not comply with penitentiary rules, and in particular with the requirements for labor. Black women appeared in LSP’s “Conduct record” for “laziness”, “not working”, “refusing to work” or for breaking a work tool (in this case a hoe). This suggests that prisoners attempted to dampen labor participation or to withdraw from it. Although it is necessary to exercise caution when reading disciplinary records; because prisoners’ actions were strictly monitored, “it can be hard to separate the products of intense workplace discipline from reactions to the use of coercion to coax labour from unwilling bodies”¹⁰⁹⁵.

Historian Alex Tepperman found out that, within a random sample of 2,398 LSP prisoners’ Convict Records (prisoners admitted over the period 1919-1935), half of the 1,817 conduct

¹⁰⁹¹ Blue, *Doing Time in the Depression*, 96–97.

¹⁰⁹² Whiddon, ““To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest””, 21; Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*, 150–57.

¹⁰⁹³ Wilson, *Forced Labor in the United States*, 67; For an analysis of these during the Interwar period, see: Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows”; Blue, *Doing Time in the Depression*.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Working prisoners asserted that they were real workers who had rights to some standard working conditions. Their assertion manifested in demands carried for instance by strikers at Folsom prison, California, or at Attica, New York in the 1970s, that included the right to freely join and form labor unions (although prisoners’ demands encompassed the improvement of material conditions more broadly and aimed to put an end to “the ruthless brutalization and disregard for the lives of the prisoners”). The U.S. prisoners’ union movement received a “devastating blow” with the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Jones v. North Carolina Prisoners’ Labor Union*, which denied union protections to incarcerated workers. See: Tibbs, *From Black Power to Prison Power*; Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement*; Thompson, *Blood in the Water*, 78; Quote by L.D. Barkley during Attica uprising. In recent years, prisoners have made several attempts to form unions and to assert their rights as workers, mostly under the banner of the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, which coordinated strikes in 2016-2017-2018. <https://incarceratedworkers.org/> Accessed June 9, 2022. For a discussion on the impact of prisoners’ work on the labor market, see Western and Beckett, “How Unregulated Is the U.S. Labor Market?”

¹⁰⁹⁵ Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan, *Unfree Workers*, 164.

infractions recorded concerned laziness. Insolence and fighting came after as motives for corporal punishments. As detailed in table 8.8 (chapter 8), the situation was different for Black women, whose discipline incidents were only 10 percent for laziness, but a third for fighting (numbers apply to women admitted between 1925-1935). Tepperman also found out that Black prisoners received four-fifths of the punishment recorded while they were only three-fifths of the prison population. Considering the gender composition of LSP population, this means that Black men received three times more punishment than white ones¹⁰⁹⁶.

The severity of punishment varied; however, Black women's resistance to coerced labor was always met by the lash. On November 10, 1908, Stella S. received twenty-three lashes from Captain Austin for "not working". On December 8, 1908, Hazel B. received eight lashes for "refusing to work," whereas on December 1, 1908, Louisa F. was struck twelve times by Austin for "refusing to work". Only a few months later, on February 8, 1909, she received only one strike according to the record, but the humiliation and the bitterness were so great that the following day she stabbed the captain who had hit her in retaliation. She could not relish her vengeance, and found herself again at the receiving end of the lash. Austin recorded he had administered fifty lashes, an exceptionally cruel punishment. How else could this cycle of resistance and retaliation have ended? Louisa F. had been convicted of assault by cutting and larceny of \$6.75 in the Caddo parish in November 1908. She arrived at LSP at 24 years old, and was serving a three-year sentence. On arrest, she had declared to her Shreveport jailers that she "had studied to be a nun" and enter a convent. Newspapers used the story of a nun-turned-into-thief in their catchy titles. They also ridiculed her religious aspirations and her manner of speaking, undermining the credibility of her claims. However, at her admission to LSP, her occupation was recorded as "schoolteacher". There were many Black Catholics in Louisiana, and it is plausible that Louisa F. was an aspirant novice who taught at a children's school operated by her order (the Holy Family in New Orleans for example)¹⁰⁹⁷. The admission records also mention that she was married, which, unless for a clerical mistake, suggests that she was lying. Even if her statements on her occupation were lies formulated to inspire clemency, she insisted on her respectability. She insisted on the fact that she had received an education and was literate. She

¹⁰⁹⁶ See Table 5.6 in: Tepperman, "Strange Bedfellows", 251.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Fessenden, "The Sisters of the Holy Family and the Veil of Race."

was also making claims of occupying a morally respectable position in society, and playing an influential role with African American children and within the Black community. She wanted to distance herself from working-class Black women, and moreover from their vulnerability to white justice¹⁰⁹⁸. Whatever was the case, Louisa F.'s disciplinary record suggests that she was not a compliant prisoner. In addition to the punishment previously mentioned, Austin struck Louisa F. eighteen times in April 1909 for "using obscene language". In December of the same year, Louisa F. was one of the participants in a collective riotous action against the new Camp D Captain, D.P. Gayle, a seasoned penitentiary staff (see introduction). Maybe Louisa F. was the main instigator of this protest action? We are left to wonder if Louisa F. was the one who had convinced her peers to ally against Captain Gayle, the white man who had victimized many of them and terrorized them all. The punishment the fifteen Black women received after their disciplinary infraction might have dissuaded them (and others who witnessed that traumatic spectacle of violence) to attempt any contestation afterwards¹⁰⁹⁹. For instance, Louisa F.'s disciplinary record stayed clean for over a year and a half before she would be "whipped" on May 24, 1911. Ironically, the reason for this punishment was "refusing to be whipped"¹¹⁰⁰.

On June 10, 1909, Captain Austin administered fifteen lashes for "not working" to Eleanora R. and Lillie J., two young women tried together in Lafourche parish for the alleged killing of another Black woman and sentenced to two years¹¹⁰¹. Only one of the two friends, Eleanora R., was also among the participants in December 1909's action against Captain Gayle, which costs her two months of her "good time". No disciplinary record is available for most of the 1910s and 1920s, making it impossible to assess the level of violence used to extract labor during the period. Carrie M. appears next, with an incident of "impertinence and laziness" which cost her twelve lashes received from Captain C. Lee Kleinpeter (one of the several members of the Kleinpeter family employed at Angola). On May 2, 1931, three Black women were violently punished by Captain J.M. Willis for their "laziness": Clara W. who was struck eighteen times, Thelma L. alias "Sunset", and Rebecca W. who each received twenty lashes. The punishment may have been

¹⁰⁹⁸ "Wanted to Be a Nun But Landed in Jail", *The Times*, October 24, 1908 ; Louisa Fields, *The Times*, October 31, 1908; Entries #4417, #4607, #4630, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Scott, *La Domination et les arts de la résistance*, 213.

¹¹⁰⁰ Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection. See page 450.

¹¹⁰¹ "Local Rays", *The Lafourche Comet*, October 8, 1908.

inflicted in the early hours of the day, before they went to their respective work spaces: Clara W. and Thelma L., both washerwomen before their conviction for crimes against property, were both “field hands” at Angola, while Rebecca W. was in charge of “general utilities” at Camp D. Willis also administered twelve lashes to another coerced farm laborer, Mabel D., on February 22, 1932, and ten to Myrtle W. on November 2, 1936, both for “laziness”¹¹⁰².

Punishments for refusing to work confirmed the guardians’ ideas that prisoners were lazy. In turn, punishing recalcitrant prisoners could be justified and construed as a positive means to instill in them a work ethic¹¹⁰³. According to LSP officials, “Laziness is a terrible thing”, and even if some prisoners resorted to self-mutilation or self-harm to avoid working, they acknowledged that: “As a rule, however, the convicts work willingly as directed”¹¹⁰⁴. Nevertheless, disciplinary records are replete with punishments for “laziness”, especially Black prisoners’. Similar discourses denouncing laziness, described as inherently African, were used for example by French administrators in France’s colonies¹¹⁰⁵.

Prisoners were compelled to work, whether they were in a condition to do so or not. According to Louis Grey Stirling, LSP physician: “Many prisoners, as soon as they reach the walls, begin practicing the symptoms of various forms of illness and feigning sickness constantly”¹¹⁰⁶. Although it is impossible to distinguish genuine claims of sickness from acts of malingering, this might have been a common tactic among prisoners to withdraw from work - or at least try to withdraw - since it seems that prisoners’ claims of being sick were not necessarily taken seriously. This was the case for Lessie B. K. who on July 31, 1958 was placed on isolation for an

¹¹⁰² Entry #16245, Volume 27, no. 16151-16824, 1925-1926; Entries #18245, #18671, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929; Entries #19772, #20064, Volume 32, no. 19451-20100, 1930; Entry #26257, Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936, LSP Collection.

¹¹⁰³ Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan, *Unfree Workers*, 185.

¹¹⁰⁴ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 8.

¹¹⁰⁵ Morelle, Planel, and Tiquet, “Mise En Travail, Prison et Enfermement. Perspectives Africaines”, 90.

¹¹⁰⁶ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1908-1909, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 115.

indefinite period for “malingering”, solitary confinement having replaced the lash in the late 1950s¹¹⁰⁷.

Black women also resorted to sabotage their working tools or the production process, and possibly even to destroy their workplace. On May 15, 1911, Captain Henry Harvey whipped Mary H., who had entered LSP one year before at 17-years-old with bruised scars on her face (probably a trace of her stay at the St-Landry parish jail), for breaking a hoe, a farming or gardening instrument¹¹⁰⁸. On May 6, 1931, a fire threatened the laundry at Camp D: was it started by some of the laundresses resorting to arson in order to interrupt labor? Dorothy G., a Black and Asian woman whose father was born in the Philippines, and who was working at Angola’s hospital at the time, was “cited for helping to fight the fire”¹¹⁰⁹. The cannery where women from Camp D were working alongside white men from Camp E and Black men from Camp A also became a space for resistance. There white women labelled the cans, whereas the Black women filled them. According to a male prisoner, sabotage was routine at the cannery:

The girls on the assembly line at the Cannery, whose task is to fill the cans with tomatoes as they pass by, have taken to adding such palatable bits as rags, rocks, sticks, and other filth to the tomatoes. The product is bound to raise a storm when it hits the freeworld grocery stores.

This sabotage did not go unnoticed, though. On June 12, 1936, Captain Willis severely beat up one of the African American women on the cannery floor, in front of other male and female prisoners:

One of the colored girls, filling the cans with tomatoes at the Cannery, was caught putting rags in her cans. She was abominably cursed by the Camp D captain who sent for the ‘bat’. On the Cannery floor, before all male workers, the woman was beaten with her dress pulled up. She screamed and writhed, causing Capt. W. to beat her on breasts and stomach with the ‘bat’. She lost control of her bowels with the pain. She caught about 25 lashes. I have never seen a more disgusting exhibition of sadism on this sorry Angola¹¹¹⁰.

¹¹⁰⁷ Conduct report, 4 June 1959, Box 9, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹¹⁰⁸ Entry #5717, Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923, LSP Collection.

¹¹⁰⁹ Entry #18308, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929, LSP Collection.

¹¹¹⁰ William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget” account of 1936, published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 11, June 13, 1953.

A few days later, Camp D Captain Willis who called the women in his charge “his bitches” assaulted a 22-year-old white woman with the ‘bat’:

She was beaten with the ‘bat’ today in the cannery for failing to label the cans fast enough. In sight of all, she was given a light ‘dusting’ of 15 lashes. Is there NOTHING human on this God-forsaken place? To see such things and to be so absolutely helpless and inarticulate to stop them¹¹¹¹!

Penitentiary records did not keep trace of these events, although on June 12, 1936, they mention that two Black women each received fifteen lashes administered by Captain J.M. Willis, allegedly for fighting¹¹¹².

There is some indication that penitentiary expectations might have been lower for white women. For instance, a newspaper commented on one of the Angola seamstresses: “she was supposed to be employed as a seamstress in the making of clothes for women, but it is said she did little work”. Lizzie B. was taken out of her cell, brought to the dining room and served coffee and cake by the matron; while left alone, she used the sergeant’s gun to commit suicide¹¹¹³. Perhaps some of LSP staff was more lenient towards white women than they were to Black ones, which this latter case clearly suggests, or at least, they wished the public would believe that they were. However, white women also resorted to destroying their production to contest labor discipline. On September 26, 1936, four white women were “locked in solitary confinement [for] 72 hours [for] insubordination [and] threats to [the matron] Mrs. Willis and destroyed clothing material in [the] tailor shop” by Captain Willis¹¹¹⁴. Despite their preferential treatment, it seems that white women did not enjoy being forced to work for the State anymore than Black women did. The sarcastic tone of Angola seamstress Juanita Hogg’s poem entitled “White Lies” seems to confirm this:

Me, I think this sewing is fun
So I checked in for quite awhile
It’s not so bad when once it’s done

¹¹¹¹ William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget” account of 1936, published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 12, June 20, 1953.

¹¹¹² Entry #24921, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935; Entry #26279, Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936, LSP Collection.

¹¹¹³ “Mrs. B... Shot Herself With a Pistol”, *State Times Advocate*, December 28, 1914.

¹¹¹⁴ Entry #25214, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935; Entry #25442, #25834, Volume 41, no. 25301-25950, 1935; Entry #26495, Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936, LSP Collection.

I'll make eight years with a smile.
I get my clothes and laundry free
My meals are cooked and served,
To ever ask for freedom – gee!
I'd really never have the nerve!¹¹¹⁵

The disciplinary records bring evidence of the willingness of coerced laborers to resist to the conditions of their exploitation, despite the high risk of retaliation. The pervasive myth of the “Black criminal class” was useful to sustain penitentiary brutal use of the lash and other torture instruments against Black prisoners¹¹¹⁶. Coercing humans to work and exploiting natural resources to produce wealth for the State of Louisiana, LSP also exercised control, surveillance and discipline through coerced labor. As it was the case in other penitentiaries, the institution reproduced racialized and gendered forms of domination¹¹¹⁷.

7.5 Time spent off work

Leaving their quarters at sunrise and coming back at nightfall, prisoners spent most of their break time in the darkness of the plantation. “Seen as unworthy of rest and recuperation time”, Black laborers had little time for anything except labor, let alone for taking a nap under the shade of a pecan tree¹¹¹⁸.

¹¹¹⁵ *Angola Argus*, Volume 1, no. 12, February 15, 1941.

¹¹¹⁶ Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*.

¹¹¹⁷ Wilson, *Forced Labor in the United States*, 62 Walter Wilson mentions the Nashville penitentiary where women were “handcuffed and hung on pegs [...] for failure to perform task”, and flogging in Alabama prisons for not doing enough work, as well as instances of the strait-jacket and solitary confinement being used on women.

¹¹¹⁸ Quote from Roderick Ferguson, *Time for Black Studies Symposium: Time, Temporality and Black Life*. Princeton University. Department of African American Studies. January 2021. African American activist Tricia Hersey, the founder of the Nap Ministry, an organization that advocates for rest as a form of resistance against burnout culture and capitalism more broadly, states that: “rest is a form of resistance because it disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy”. She is the author of the forthcoming book *Rest is Resistance, A Manifesto* (October 2022). <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/> Accessed June 9, 2022.

The penitentiary authorities gave priority to the production, which meant for instance that Christmas was more often spent cutting sugar cane than celebrating the holiday. On some years, Independence Day was marked by a break of productive activities, and prisoners appreciated more the break in the routine than the celebration in itself, which for instance in 1936 consisted of “roast goat with a stench only a dog could stand. [and] Two barrels of so-called lemonade in the yard [which] were consumed within ten minutes” after a morning spent in the fields picking fresh cantaloupes that they were not allowed to eat because those were produced only to be sold in the “free world”¹¹¹⁹. Walter Wilson denounced the fact that:

to cover up and distract attention from such conditions which prevail for convicts both while on the job and during rest hours, various publicity-seeking prison officials give the convicts a treat about once a year. These treats include entertainments of various sorts - turkey dinners, speeches by social workers, movie stars and so on. The latest scheme is to have football games. Thus the New York Times, November 18, 1931, carried an editorial praising Sing Sing’s football eleven. But less than two weeks later the same paper reported that additional tear gas equipment was being sent to the Great Meadow Prison (in the same state) and that 30 additional guards had been requested by Warden Joseph H. Wilson¹¹²⁰.

In the 1950s, the wives of Angola employees orchestrated some celebrations:

Spurred on by the realization that Angola’s women inmates are virtually forgotten in activities current on the farm, the wives of the personnel decided to do something about it. Meeting here, the women formed a fund-raising committee which buttonholed every LSP employe [sic] for a donation. Slot-in-top bottles were installed at the Angola Store. [...] a total of \$130 had been raised. [...] the Camp D women were each handed a gift package. In the box, specially wrapped in traditional Christmas trimmings, was a head scarf, nail polish, lip-stick, handkerchief, and writing paper¹¹²¹.

Apart from the occasional holidays, Angola prisoners had no other break from routine than Sundays. Considering the long work hours and the strenuous tasks they were assigned to, “Sunday was spent in sleep, in rest, in accumulating strength enough to go on with the next day’s labor”¹¹²². Despite being the only day off, Sundays were also subject to a schedule, leaving little room for natural needs. Therefore, a change in the wake-up hour (7am instead of 5:30am) was

¹¹¹⁹ William Sadler’s Angola Diary “Lest we forget” account of 1936, published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 15, July 4, 1953.

¹¹²⁰ Wilson, *Forced Labor in the United States*, 60–61.

¹¹²¹ *The Angolite*, Volume 2, no. 1, Christmas Day, 1953.

¹¹²² “Hell on Angola”, *The New Orleans Item*, July 9, 1943.

most welcome by prisoners: “More Sunday sack [bed] time makes everybody happy”¹¹²³. However, even Sunday rest was routinely compromised by LSP production imperatives, which Catholic Chaplain Van Grinsven denounced, not only because work interfered with rest, but also with attendance at religious services:

during the past year, too many times, it seems that the convicts have been compelled to common labor on Sundays; this, I am sure, does not tend to uplifting of their moral character; on the contrary, it has a certain detrimental and pernicious influence on their morals as well as their spirit¹¹²⁴.

It is impossible from the sources to determine whether prisoners perceived attendance at religious celebrations as a positive activity in itself, as a distraction from routine, or as a duty imposed on the prisoner’s day off¹¹²⁵. At LSP, prisoners could participate in religious activities in hopes of receiving a better treatment, or else gain the chaplains’ support for their clemency applications. Unfortunately, prisoners’ religion was recorded systematically at LSP only for a very short period (1933-1935). Among the 108 Black women admitted during these three years, 66.7 percent declared being Baptist, 10.2 percent Methodist and 9.3 percent Catholic. Another 10.2 percent declared having no religion or belonging to no church. All this suggests that the majority of them might have attended religious service and been in contact with one of the chaplains. The following table is based on data provided by the Biennial report 1938-1939 on the religious faith of prisoners held on December 31, 1939. The major difference between Black women and Black men is a much higher proportion of men who declared not professing religion. There is an important racial difference as well: whereas Catholics were dominant among whites, a majority of African Americans were Baptists.

Table 7.5: Religious faith among LSP Black female prisoners, compared to other categories of prisoners held on December 31, 1939

	Black women (n=121)	Black men (n=2,105)	White men & women (n=906)
Catholic	13.2%	11.7%	32.3%

¹¹²³ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 19, August 1, 1953.

¹¹²⁴ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 127.

¹¹²⁵ Maxwell-Stewart and Quinlan, *Unfree Workers*, 173; Stephanie Gaskill examines religion in today’s context where most of Angola prisoners are serving life sentences without possibility of parole. Gaskill, “Moral Rehabilitation: Religion, Race, and Reform in America’s Incarceration Capital.”

Baptist	70.2%	52.2%	26.6%
Methodist	5.8%	8.3%	10.3%
All other protestants	0.8%	1.0%	8.8%
No professed religion	9.9%	26.9%	22.0%

Source: Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Table on page 37.

Given the small number of chaplains for thousands of penitentiary prisoners, their spiritual assistance was mostly achieved through the distribution of religious literature. Several philanthropists and Bible institutes from Louisiana and from out of State sent chaplains “quantities of good reading matter” for that purpose¹¹²⁶. Some of these reformers would occasionally visit Angola and meet with prisoners, such as New Yorker Maud Ballington Booth, nicknamed “Little Mother”, the founder of the Volunteer Prisoners’ League. Prisoners becoming members of the League would receive “a certificate of membership, a button and reading-matter free of all cost”¹¹²⁷. Occasionally, chaplains would administer sacraments, such as the baptism of four Black women in the muddy Mississippi river performed by a Black Baptist reverend in August 1953¹¹²⁸. Chaplains had competition, since Voodoo was also practiced at Angola. In March 1950, Mary H. was placed in solitary confinement for ten days for “practicing Voo-Doo & Black Magic for a price”; by her own admission she was also “active in the Protestant Church Activities of the Women’s prison”¹¹²⁹. When arrested the year prior for a murder she claimed to be innocent of, the woman was said to “indulge in voodoo practices”, which she had denied when questioned by the Baton Rouge detectives¹¹³⁰.

While chaplains, either Protestant or Catholic, held religious services at Angola’s different camps, issues of transportation and security prevented the organization of services at a dedicated chapel. The absence of a place dedicated to religious activities often meant that chaplains had to

¹¹²⁶ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 122.

¹¹²⁷ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1908-1909, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 107.

¹¹²⁸ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 23, August 29, 1953.

¹¹²⁹ Conduct report, 8 August 1958; Letter to Judge Fred S. LeBlanc, EBR, 27 August 1958, Box 7, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹¹³⁰ “Body of Aged Negro Man, Ax Murder Victim, Is Found Thrown in Truck”, *State Times Advocate*, August 26, 1949.

improvise their place of work: during an investigation of LSP operations, Father Marionneaux declared: “to interview men we go in the dining room. I do a great deal of mine right in my car. That’s my office. We go into the lobby and pull up a table and talk, or we sit down in the dining room”. To the same committee, Reverend Smith stated: “I have stood up on a poker table and preached”¹¹³¹. Besides, chaplains had a rather surprisingly lenient attitude towards gambling in prison:

Well, now, the boys often ask me about gambling. I tell them it is not a sin. I point out its dangers, and to be careful of overdoing it. The sinful part comes in when we are spending our time gambling that we should be attending to our duties. The big danger of it is that you are going to overdo it, so the best thing to do is to leave it alone¹¹³².

Asked by Archbishop Rummel if he would not advocate permitting gambling in the various Angola camps, the Catholic chaplain shared with his superior both his discomfort and his pragmatic position considering the absence of activities not related to prison labor: “Well, I’m rather hesitant to talk there. There is no social life at all there, and it is a pastime. If you are going to forbid it outright, it’s going to be done under cover”¹¹³³.

For many decades, it seems that administrators did not organize any recreational activities at Angola. Later, male camps started to form sports teams who would compete against each other. Music bands (all-white or all-Black) also formed. Women were generally excluded from these activities, both as participants and spectators, except when LSP organized special celebrations. In the early 1940s, “a tennis court was constructed, croquet sets were purchases and soccer ball was also initiated. In addition, several table tennis sets were installed” at Camp D¹¹³⁴. Movie screenings were organized in every camp thanks to money collected by LSP from prisoners themselves through the “commissary”, and these screenings constituted one of the only alternatives to gambling:

A system of weekly movie shows was set up. The program, I believe, is still continued – and in the same manner in which it started: the inmates pay for the films shown by a collection taken at each camp prior to the show! There is NO OTHER

¹¹³¹ Smith’s interview, 1944 Hearings, 4. Marionneaux’s interview, 1944 Hearings, 121.

¹¹³² Marionneaux’s interview, 1944 Hearings, 137.

¹¹³³ Marionneaux’s interview, 1944 Hearings, 138.

¹¹³⁴ Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1943-1944, State of Louisiana, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1944, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC. Quote on page 83.

RECREATION! In fact, nothing to do on a Sunday, or on the occasional rainy days which are work-free, except to gamble. Angola, at such times, and at all camps even including the women's unit – becomes a veritable Monte Carlo, with every trick and gaming device known to separate the newcomer, or others, from their money!¹¹³⁵

Prisoners' experiences of time at Angola were also shaped by the relationships they had outside of the penitentiary and those they made within the prison system, and prison authorities intended to manage both categories. Geographical distance and lack of accessibility of the penitentiary-plantation made it virtually impossible for prisoners' loved ones to visit them at Angola, especially in the first decades of the twentieth century¹¹³⁶. By the early 1950s, visits were permitted every other Sunday, and were segregated by race: one Sunday, white prisoners could receive visits, and the next it was the Black prisoners' turn. The logic of segregating the prisoners by race extended to their families and friends, who the penitentiary administration assumed belonged to the same racial group. The space devoted to visits could serve both groups only if interracial mingling was proscribed¹¹³⁷.

Because of poverty and frequent illiteracy, Black families were even more unlikely to visit or write letters frequently, and Black prisoners' low rates of literacy made it difficult to write or receive letters. Indeed, as shown in the following table, there was a discrepancy in literacy scores between white and Black women admitted to LSP. Unsurprisingly, it also shows that later admissions present higher literacy scores. These findings are consistent with numbers presented by the penitentiary officials stating that, in 1901, 63 percent of the total penitentiary population

¹¹³⁵ Proposal for a Survey at Angola, undated, ca. 1944, Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, 184-26, Folder 215.1, Legislation and Draft or Report, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans. Quote on page 4.

¹¹³⁶ The visits posed two interconnected challenges to family members and friends: distance and costs. For the ones fortunate enough to possess a vehicle (when in the later period, Angola started being accessible by road), they could drive up to the penitentiary or take the ferry to cross the Mississippi from Pointe Coupée Parish), but for the others, probably the majority according to *the Angolite* editor in 1953, they had to take the bus to St. Francisville, then from there either take a taxi service which fees were "ofttimes beyond the purse of the average visitor" to Angola or "depend on charity or the hitchhiker's technique" to do the remaining 27 miles. The latter, however, was unlikely to be an option for Black people during Jim Crow when they would have risked becoming white drivers' easy target for insults, attacks or worse on the isolated road between St-Francisville and Angola. As a reminder the Green Book was published until 1966 to protect Black travellers from bad encounters. *The Angolite* requested that the penitentiary institute some sort of transportation on visitors' days, which was announced by Warden Sigler the following month. (Source: *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 6, May 9, 1953 & no. 10, June 1, 1953). *The Angolite* also campaigned for and obtained the creation of a "fund for use by convicts suddenly permitted leave for death or sickness in the family" (Source: "Angola's Penitentiary Press", *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1953).

¹¹³⁷ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 9, May 30, 1953.

was unable to read¹¹³⁸. Despite this acknowledgement, there is no evidence of any effort to teach prisoners even the basics of reading and writing skills before the end of the 1920s.

Table 7.6: Number and percentage of female admissions per race by literacy score (1901-1909, 1920-1935)¹¹³⁹

	Black women				white women			
	Before 1910		After 1920		Before 1910		After 1920	
Not able to read and write	116	56.9%	136	27.9%	6	42.9%	3	4.9%
Able to read or write	2	1.0%						
Able to read and write	84	41.2%	351	71.9%	7	50.0%	58	95.1%
Non available	2	1.0%	1	0.2%	1	7.1%		
Total	204	100%	488	100%	14	100%	61	100%

Source: Angola Women's Database

It is easy to imagine that infrequent contacts between the captives and their loved ones in the “free world” resulted in the harm or destruction of affective ties¹¹⁴⁰. According to former Angola prisoner William Sadler:

For a man or a woman who had been imprisoned for a year or longer – some of them for as many as seven, ten or twelve years – prison is another world, with separate manners and customs. The prisoners must “conform” to those “inside” rules or break, willy-nilly. As months and years pass for the inmate, much of all contact with the “outside” world is lost¹¹⁴¹.

Nevertheless, some prisoners were thinking about home and their loved ones left behind, as this poem by Artie Mae H., a female prisoner, attests:

“HOMECOMING”

It's been so long since we parted
Oh, why did I have to go 'way?
I'm here all alone, broken-hearted
But that is the price I must pay.

And why did we have to part, dear
You meant so much to me

¹¹³⁸ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC.

¹¹³⁹ The 1910s decade was excluded because of the high number of ‘non available’ answers.

¹¹⁴⁰ For a thorough discussion on the subject in contemporary prisons, see: Ricordeau, *Les détenus et leurs proches*.

¹¹⁴¹ “Blueprint for New Angola”, *The New Orleans Item*, December 31, 1943.

But never mind, some day we'll find
Our love that used to be.

They can't keep me here forever
That I know to be true
And I'm looking towards that day when I'm free
I'll be coming back home to you¹¹⁴².

Loneliness and despair caused by separation from relatives and friends might have been particularly challenging for women with children¹¹⁴³. The large proportion of women occupying a job outside of their household before their incarceration also suggests that their sentence impacted negatively their household's incomes.

Finally, women detained at Camp D impacted each other's experiences of time. Some aspects of their relationships will be discussed in the last chapter. In general though, sources were very silent on this aspect of incarceration, leaving much to speculation. Prisoners' accounts of their incarceration in other prisons can inform these speculations. For instance, after a sentence served at Alderson, the federal women's prison, Helen Bryan was writing:

The arrival of a new girl in the cottage helped us to get by time. We heard something about her before she came. We speculated about how she would adjust. We were impatient to hear her story. We could hardly wait to see how soon she would feel at home with us and how she got on at the officer's table. Each of us old girls was glad we were not she, just beginning our cottage life, because at least we had got by more time than she had. In general the new girl adapted easily as most of us tried to help her¹¹⁴⁴.

According to sociologist Gwenola Ricordeau, time in prison is marked by memorable events, such as riots, deaths or a new warden. It is also marked, as Bryan's account suggests, by new admissions and discharges¹¹⁴⁵.

¹¹⁴² Louisiana State Penitentiary, "Souvenir Book of Poems: Poems by Angola prisoners", Call number La 811 Lou 1946, Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge.

¹¹⁴³ No information was available on motherhood among women incarcerated at Angola, except for the 1910 federal census where married and widowed women were asked the number of children they had birthed and the number of children still alive. At Camp D, 39 women replied that they had birthed a total of 141 children, and 50 of those were still alive.

¹¹⁴⁴ Bryan, *Inside*, 250–51.

¹¹⁴⁵ Ricordeau, "« Faire son temps » et « attendre »", 62.

Conclusion of chapter 7

Despite LSP officials' desire to have as many "productive workers" as possible among prisoners, and to make the most out of their coerced labor, prisoners' labor was not always organized in the most efficient ways - as during slavery when short-term gains were pursued and technological progress was retarded¹¹⁴⁶. Nevertheless, at Angola, labor was an essential feature of Black women's incarceration, and their daily schedule was centered about work, with very little time left for other activities. Indeed, "hard labor" characterized incarceration at the State penitentiary in Jim Crow Louisiana, as much as the history of (female) prisons¹¹⁴⁷. Almost always mentioned explicitly in the district court minute books or dockets, the term "hard labor" was juxtaposed with the length of the penitentiary sentence, emphasizing the physical sufferings that incarceration implied. Because all Louisiana parishes did not organize for their prisoners to work locally (although several operated convict camps to perform public work such as road construction), judges (and others) favored penitentiary sentences. Indeed, at Angola, instead of being "idle," men and women "would have to work on the cotton or sugar estates of the State"¹¹⁴⁸. Erin Hatton argues that: "Prisoners, by virtue of their incarceration, are deemed to be fundamentally immoral, and their labor is construed as punishment, reparation, or rehabilitation for their 'wickedness,'" an idea already prevailing in nineteenth century penology¹¹⁴⁹. Hatton uncovers the historical construction of work and of the narrative of the "wickedness" from the slavery period: indeed, proponents of slavery portrayed enslaved people as innately lazy and immoral and considered they had to be taught to work¹¹⁵⁰. In their perspective, enslaved people had to be taught to work because they were portrayed as innately lazy and immoral. Hatton highlights that this same narrative "served as the cultural scaffolding for their violent exploitation, subjugation, and

¹¹⁴⁶ Oudin-Bastide, *Travail, capitalisme et société esclavagiste: Guadeloupe, Martinique (XVII-XIX siècle)*, 77.

¹¹⁴⁷ Dobash, Dobash, and Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women*, chap. 2.

¹¹⁴⁸ "Sentenced", *The Times-Picayune*, August 23, 1904.

¹¹⁴⁹ Hatton, *Coerced: Work under Threat of Punishment*, 31–32. See also: Zatz, "Prison Labor and the Paradox of Paid Nonmarket Work".

¹¹⁵⁰ Hatton, 35.

coercion” and was used “over time and across groups”¹¹⁵¹. The South was presented as a “school” where “Africans may learn productive industry . . . to acquire habits of steady labor,” and develop skills, for instance the “knowledge of all the mysteries of skilful planting”¹¹⁵². After Emancipation, debt peonage and convict leasing served to secure unpaid or coerced work from African Americans using the same cultural narrative of “wickedness” and “idleness” against former enslaved men and women reluctant to be exploited to the extent that they had been during slavery¹¹⁵³. This narrative was an integral part of the ideological construction of what Khalil Gibran Muhammad has termed “the condemnation of blackness.” White authorities designed new forms of coerced labor with the objective of correcting the alleged moral weakness attached to the Black “criminal class,” in addition to extracting the highest economic profit possible from them¹¹⁵⁴. Indeed, prisoners’ labor was also crucial to penitentiary officials; it made the institution not only self-sufficient for food and other resources, but also profitable by producing crops intended for sales, such as cotton or sugar, as well as fruits and vegetables.

Penitentiary officials put women to work, and like during slavery, Black women were assigned to tasks that were physically demanding and usually considered fit only for men, as well as tasks traditionally considered more fit for women, such as domestic tasks (in which most were already skilled). Race combined with gender determined prisoners’ labor assignments at LSP. The differentiated tasks assigned to white and Black women ensured that white women, even incarcerated, could feel superior to their Black counterparts.

LSP officials very much adopted the same perspective on labor as slaveholders and other capitalist entrepreneurs: considering productive only the labor that brought more capital, and non-productive the other tasks performed by prisoners¹¹⁵⁵. However, as Dennis Childs argued, this dichotomy obscures the reality of coerced labor in carceral settings:

¹¹⁵¹ Hatton, 32.

¹¹⁵² Dr. Daniel Lee, “Agricultural Apprentices and Laborers”, *Southern Cultivator* 12, no. 6, June 1854 quoted by Berry, “*Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe*”: *Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia*, 16.

¹¹⁵³ Berry, 132–33.

¹¹⁵⁴ Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*.

¹¹⁵⁵ Oudin-Bastide, *Travail, capitalisme et société esclavagiste: Guadeloupe, Martinique (XVII-XIX siècle)*, 134.

A market-centered approach to the issue of prison slave labor discounts the central role of ostensibly unproductive travail to the functioning and reproduction of the carceral state. In other words, the majority of a prisoner's average daily "labor" output in today's prison involves the everyday "smooth" operation of the institution itself [...]. From the purview of prisoners, semantic niceties as to whether the infinite labors associated with "doin' time" should be defined as productive or unproductive does nothing to diminish the fact that any species of work (or apparent prison industrial idleness) clocked within walls, cages, razor wire, or plantation fields amounts to neoslave labor¹¹⁵⁶.

The "non-productive" labor performed by incarcerated men and women towards the maintenance of the institution served institutional needs that were put before the prisoners' need for useful training and rehabilitation¹¹⁵⁷. LSP authorities exploited conceptions of "natural female duties" to lower the costs of operating a penitentiary, such as laundry, uniform making or cooking. Those feminine tasks were extremely useful to the penitentiary despite being considered as "non-productive" because they did not produce goods that would be sold to the outside (mostly to other State institutions). They also kept the women busy and prevented their alleged 'idleness,' considered the worst condition for prisoners, because of its potential outcomes: gambling, fighting, or even the forging of intimate relationships between women.

The "non-productive" labor extracted from incarcerated Black women in white homes at Angola and beyond, up to the highest level of state government, is another illustration of how reproductive labor was also essential to the daily functioning of an institution driven by profit. Despite their small numbers, the Black women who toiled in the homes of LSP white staff are historically significant: their experiences demonstrate that prisons are sites for the making of race and that the white home is an integral part in the penal system¹¹⁵⁸. In this scheme, white housewives and children also benefitted from Black women's coerced domestic labor, which only reinforced "white supremacist structures of racial subordination"¹¹⁵⁹. Examining the occupations of Black women at the penitentiary-plantation allowed for a renewed perspective on how white supremacy "survives and thrives because whiteness delivers unfair gains and unjust

¹¹⁵⁶ Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 221–22.

¹¹⁵⁷ Feinman, *Women in the Criminal Justice System*, 28.

¹¹⁵⁸ For more on this, see Rech, "Black Women's Domestic Labor at Angola (Louisiana State Penitentiary) during Jim Crow".

¹¹⁵⁹ Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 181.

enrichment to people who participate in and profit from the existence of a racial cartel that skews opportunities and life chances for their own benefit”¹¹⁶⁰. Their numerous occupations at Angola penitentiary demonstrate that Black women were as much as other Black prisoners part of what historian Manning Marable called “capitalism’s necessary reserve army of labor”¹¹⁶¹.

At Angola, labor was also at the center of the discipline system; i.e., coerced labor was a way to discipline and repress the men and women incarcerated, and their refusal to work also served as a pretext to punish them, as they were frequently subjugated to the lashes for their alleged “laziness” or “refusal to work.” Indeed, physical and sexual violence was central to the threat system used to extract labor from African American women at Angola, just as Talitha LeFlouria has argued was the case in the South’s convict camps in the aftermath of the Civil War¹¹⁶². The brutality of the Louisiana institution, often publicly denounced, persisted (and in fact still persists) through successive waves of reforms and political promises¹¹⁶³. If LSP officials did not express any desire to rehabilitate the alleged criminals in their “care” during Jim Crow, labor could at least correct “the evil of [Black] female loafarism” denounced by white Southerners who, since Emancipation, had felt “deprived” of subservient labor¹¹⁶⁴.

¹¹⁶⁰ Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 36.

¹¹⁶¹ Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 126.

¹¹⁶² LeFlouria, ““Under the Sting of the Lash.””

¹¹⁶³ Carleton, *Politics and Punishment*.

¹¹⁶⁴ Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 45.

PART IV

BODILY EXPERIENCES

“The very real function of racism is to be able to ignore the screams as you tear apart a human being”.
(Nicolas Ensley Mitchell)¹¹⁶⁵

Bodies were at the heart of the incarceration experiences for Black women confined at Angola during Jim Crow. Along with Lombroso who came up with theories of criminal men and women derived from a racist and misogynist bias, many thought that the body was a source of information on crime, as well as the siege of potential cures for crime¹¹⁶⁶. From their entrance in the penal system, with police identification methods, to their admission in the penitentiary where physical features were carefully recorded, the body of the prisoner was under scrutiny¹¹⁶⁷. Once in the carceral system, this body was transformed into a productive tool through coerced labor. Recalcitrant Black female bodies would experience corporal punishment, and later solitary confinement. In their dealings with the prison system, prisoners could not count on the support of prison physicians whose healing role was often obliterated by their faith and support to the carceral regime. Examining this range of experiences inform on the victimization that Black

¹¹⁶⁵ Nicholas Ensley Mitchell, “The Only Politics is Blood — On Replacement Theory in America”, *The North Star*, May 17, 2022. <https://www.thenorthstar.com/p/the-only-politics-is-blood-on-replacement?triedSigningIn=true> Accessed August 8, 2022.

¹¹⁶⁶ Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*, 247–48.

¹¹⁶⁷ Anderson, *Legible Bodies : Race, Criminality and Colonialism in South Asia*, 2–3.

women encountered throughout their incarceration. Bodily experiences also illustrate how a racial hierarchy between Black and white female prisoners was applied through prison discipline.

CHAPTER 8

DESACRALIZED FEMALE BLACK BODIES

Black women arrived at LSP at a young age; nevertheless, their bodies were already marked by the precarious life conditions African Americans were subjected to during Jim Crow. Previous chapters revealed the centrality of coerced labor in prisoners' lives, and the systematic recourse of corporal punishment as a means to extract labor from unwilling workers and to keep the prison running. As a result, Black women's bodies were affected by labor and punishment practices. In addition to the impact of confinement on bodies through the material conditions of incarceration, the white supremacist hierarchy in place at Angola rested on the domination of the Black female bodies through sexual and sexualized forms of violence. It is also through their bodies that Black women incarcerated at Angola demonstrated resistance to this hierarchy and to the carceral regime. Angola prisoners were denied proper medical attention and healthcare, resulting in a deterioration of their health conditions, and at times in premature death.

This chapter insists on the specificities of Black women's bodily experiences in comparison to male prisoners and to white women held on the penitentiary-plantation. It also highlights the ambiguous figure of the prison physician and his role in the degradation and commodification of Black female bodies.

8.1 Black women's health conditions before incarceration

This section proposes to examine some data drawn from the Angola Women's Database (1901-1935), which provide a portrait of African American women's health before their incarceration at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. In particular, this section focuses on stature, body mass index, teeth condition, body marks and wounds recorded by penitentiary authorities at their admission. White women were excluded of this portrait because of their marginal numbers among Angola female population. The small size of the population should be kept in mind when considering the claims advanced in this section. Notwithstanding these limitations, the Black female population at Angola is sufficiently large to address (for the first time in a historical study) some of the health conditions of Louisiana's Black female population during the first decades of the 20th century. Indeed, little research has documented the biological living standards of African Americans in the U.S. due to the scarcity of sources on the subject¹¹⁶⁸. Again, this data is presented with the assumption that the Black female population at Angola resembles the characteristics of Louisiana's Black women belonging to the working-class.

8.1.1 Stature

On their admission, LSP prisoners were measured in feet and inches; all measurements analyzed in this project were standardized to centimeters¹¹⁶⁹. The average height of Black women admitted

¹¹⁶⁸ Maloney and Carson, "Living Standards in Black and White: Evidence from the Heights of Ohio Prison Inmates, 1829-1913."

¹¹⁶⁹ "Even with accurate measurement, some variation in individual stature is to be expected. Individuals are at their tallest in the morning but tend to shrink during the day because of the compression of the fibrous discs of cartilage that separate the vertebrae. Depending on the times in the day in which measurements are taken, variations of up to an inch should be expected". Inwood et al., "Growing Incomes, Growing People in Nineteenth-Century Tasmania", 195.

to LSP over the period 1901-1935 was 163.44 centimeters (n=963). It was 163.85 centimeters (5'4") for adult women 22 years old or over (n=572)¹¹⁷⁰. In comparison, the smallest adult woman admitted was Carrie S. She arrived at LSP in 1934 at 29 years old measuring only 132 centimeters (4'4"). Carrie S. was born in Morganza in Pointe-Coupée Parish, a rural parish located on the other side of the Mississippi river from Angola, and she was convicted of manslaughter there as well¹¹⁷¹.

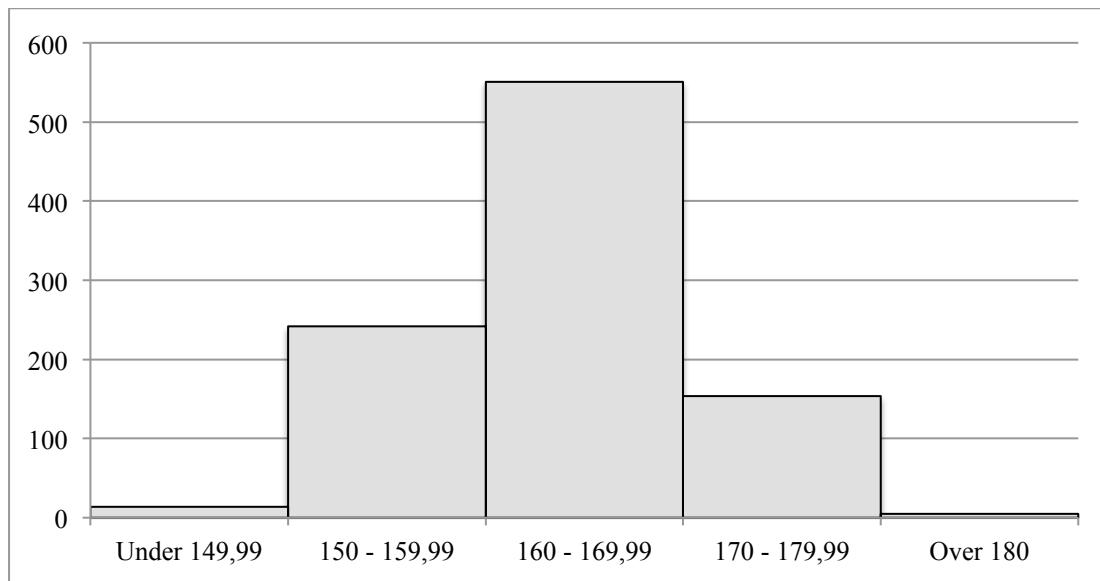
The figure below presents the repartition of Black women incarcerated at Angola over the period 1901-1935 in different height categories. Tables presented in Appendix K provide information on the stature of the same Black women along different variables. Mean height and median height for different groups composing the Black female LSP population are provided. A slight stature differential was observed between property offenders and individuals sentenced for crimes against persons. This is consistent with the existing literature since theft is commonly conceived as a sign of poverty¹¹⁷². For the rest, results do not confirm previous assumptions. For instance, among Black women at Angola, those who knew how to read and write were not taller than the others, and no sign of stature increase along birth cohorts was observed.

¹¹⁷⁰ Conversely, white women 22 years old or over admitted to LSP over the same period had an average stature of 162.88 centimeters, although this information might not be reliable due to the small size of this sample (n=73).

¹¹⁷¹ Entry #24604, Volume 39, no. 24001-24650, 1933-1934, LSP Collection.

¹¹⁷² Maloney and Carson, "Living Standards in Black and White: Evidence from the Heights of Ohio Prison Inmates, 1829-1913."

Figure 8.1: Distribution of Black women's stature (in centimeters), Admissions 1901-1935



Source: Angola Women's Database

Prison data generally contain disproportionate numbers of economically disadvantaged individuals whose stature might be lower than the general population. Indeed: "Prison data may reflect shorter individuals who received sub-standard net-nutrition throughout their growth years; consequently, women in prison may reflect conditions among lower socioeconomic status groups who turned to crime for survival"¹¹⁷³. As mentioned before (see chapter 2 section 2.3.1), biometric studies have shown that food deprivation during childhood and other environmental factors can have lifelong effects on stature. Since those raised in poverty often remained poor and are more likely to commit (economic) crimes, shorter people are more likely to find themselves incarcerated¹¹⁷⁴. It is generally admitted that:

While the height attained by any given individual is affected by genetic and other idiosyncrasies, the average height of population groups is determined mainly by net nutrition in childhood, especially early childhood, and in adolescence.[...] Net nutrition refers to the balance between nutrition 'inputs' and the physical demands of work, illness, and the like. Higher levels of nutrition are required when work is more arduous and sickness strikes¹¹⁷⁵.

¹¹⁷³ Carson, "Black and White Female Body Mass Index Values in the Developing Late 19th and Early 20th Century United States", 312–13.

¹¹⁷⁴ Inwood et al., "Growing Incomes, Growing People in Nineteenth-Century Tasmania", 201.

¹¹⁷⁵ Coatsworth, "Welfare", 3.

Therefore, the data produced in this project cannot be extrapolated to the whole African American population outside of the penitentiary. However, it can inform on the distribution of material conditions within the African American working-class. It can also give an indication of some external factors, such as urbanization. It has been demonstrated in previous biometric studies that there is an “urban penalty”, i.e. a negative impact on the material conditions of people in urban settings in terms of nutrition, disease transmission and mortality, affecting individuals’ stature, particularly at the bottom of the social scale¹¹⁷⁶. Urbanization, as well as growing income and wealth inequalities in the 19th century and the stagnation of wages for the working-class after the turn of the 20th century contributed greatly to the decrease of the stature among Americans; the U.S. population recovering its average stature of the late 18th century only in the 1920s¹¹⁷⁷.

Studies of African Americans’ stature after Emancipation usable as a point of comparison all rely on prison data. In a study on 19th century female prisoners, Carson determined that among individuals born in the Southeast region (which includes Louisiana), Black women’s stature was 160.47 centimeters (n=1,744) whereas white women’s average stature was 162.25 centimeters (n=423). Black women admitted at LSP were a few centimeters taller than the ones studied by Carson, which suggests that material conditions improved for the generations born and raised after Emancipation in comparison to the ones born and raised during slavery¹¹⁷⁸. Carson also found out that, despite great variations in stature during the 19th century due to a complex set of demographic and socioeconomic variables impacted by industrialization, war and emancipation,

¹¹⁷⁶ See for instance : Frank, “Stature in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro.”

¹¹⁷⁷ Coatsworth, “Welfare”, 4, 7, 10.

¹¹⁷⁸ During slavery, due to diet restrictions, hard work from a younger age, brutality, and poor living conditions, enslaved children had health and height deficits. Enslaved children, often fed separately from adults, appear to have been deliberately undernourished by slaveholders in the Southern States. See: Steckel, “A Dreadful Childhood: The Excess Mortality of American Slaves”. Quoted in: Coatsworth, 7; These conditions contributed to African Americans’ stature being lower than that of whites. Richard Steckel, one of the foremost authorities on historical biometrics, has shown that enslaved female children’s growth was retarded in childhood, as much as male, but their growth caught up during adolescence. See: Steckel, “A Peculiar Population: The Nutrition, Health, and Mortality of American Slaves from Childhood to Maturity”; The material inequalities undergone by the enslaved caused stature to vary by race in 19th century U.S. According to one of the pioneering studies on the subject, there were also stature variations among slaves over time, as well as stature variations along the slaves’ occupation, “field hands” being in average taller than domestic and “skilled slaves”. See: Margo and Steckel, “The Heights of American Slaves: New Evidence on Slave Nutrition and Health”. Quoted in: Carson, “Health during Industrialization: Evidence from the Nineteenth-Century Pennsylvania State Prison System.”

white women were always taller than Black ones although the white–black stature differential among women was not as large as it was for men. As far as women were concerned, Carson concluded that their stature differential was explained by “nonidentifiable characteristics, such as differences in access to nutrition, overt racial prejudice, and economic exclusion”¹¹⁷⁹. In comparison, Maloney and Carson’s study of Ohio inmates over the period 1829-1913 found out that there were 2,082 Southern-born Black adult males who had a mean height of 170.63 centimeters¹¹⁸⁰. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, comparisons for the same period with other groups at Angola or with the general population of Louisiana or the United States are not possible due to the lack of data available.

8.1.2 Body Mass Index (BMI)

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a standard measure of health. Historical studies have demonstrated that, until the sedentarization of post-industrial society, BMI values tended to follow economic conditions. They also provide an important perspective on health conditions, as well as their evolution; for instance, there is an inverse relationship between BMI and mortality risk due to malnutrition, tuberculosis or other diseases¹¹⁸¹. Using the World Health Organization (WHO) BMI classification coding system for modern standards, BMI values below 18.5 are classified as underweight, those between 18.5 and 24.9 as normal, values between 24.9 and 29.9 as overweight, while BMIs over 30 are considered obese. Morbid obesity is defined as a BMI over 40¹¹⁸². While BMIs allow for easy weight classification, it has clear shortcomings, as Carson

¹¹⁷⁹ Carson, “Socioeconomic Effects on the Stature of Nineteenth-Century US Women.” Quote on p. 138.

¹¹⁸⁰ Maloney and Carson, “Living Standards in Black and White: Evidence from the Heights of Ohio Prison Inmates, 1829–1913.”

¹¹⁸¹ Carson, “Racial Differences in Body Mass Indices of Men Imprisoned in 19th Century Texas.”

¹¹⁸² Carson, 124.

alerts: “BMI does not distinguish between fat and fat-free mass”, which means that more muscular individuals are more likely to be considered as overweight¹¹⁸³.

The average BMI for adult Black women (over 22 years old) admitted to LSP was 23.5 (this value serves as reference in the tables presented in Appendix L). In comparison, the adult woman admitted with the smallest BMI was Pearl M., admitted to LSP in 1934 at 23 years old with a BMI of 16.0. Native from Amesville (present-day Marrero in Jefferson parish) and residing in LaPlace (Saint-John-the-Baptist, one of the sugar parishes), she was convicted in this parish for violating Act #44 of 1890 (“assault, stab and wound with intent to kill”). Despite being extremely frail, Pearl M. was assigned to field work during her incarceration at Angola. In July 1935, less than a year into her one-to-two-year sentence, Governor O.K. Allen granted her a reprieve. The penitentiary General manager had recommended the reprieve after he received support letters from the sheriff, the school superintendent and two other men from her parish. They all attested of “her previous good record as a quiet, law-abiding woman” and offered their “strong sponsorship”¹¹⁸⁴. Penitentiary authorities were probably more likely to let go a laborer whose body was not strong enough to resist extremely demanding labor conditions.

Conversely, Lillian R. had one of the highest BMI among Black women admitted to LSP. The penitentiary officials might have chosen Lillian R. to be “forewoman” at Camp D because of her imposing size. Typically, the institution entrusted people convicted of crimes against persons for trusty assignments. Therefore, Lillian R. represented an unusual choice for a trusty since she had been convicted of larceny. Indeed, along with her accomplice Indiana G. (who herself would serve a second sentence at LSP for receiving stolen goods), she was tried in 1927 for stealing a white man’s money (\$72). From the criminal record, we learn that Indiana G. stole the man’s cash in his trousers while he was having sex with Lillian R. It was the second time that Lillian R. was charged in Orleans parish for the same crime, although her first trial the year prior resulted in an acquittal. Another of her white clients had complained that she had robbed him of \$140 while

¹¹⁸³ Carson, “Black and White Female Body Mass Index Values in the Developing Late 19th and Early 20th Century United States”, 316.

¹¹⁸⁴ Entry # 24885, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935, LSP Collection; R.L. Himes to Governor O.K. Allen, 10 July 1935, Volume 12, 1934-March 1936, Collection P1975-021, Pardons 1892-1940, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

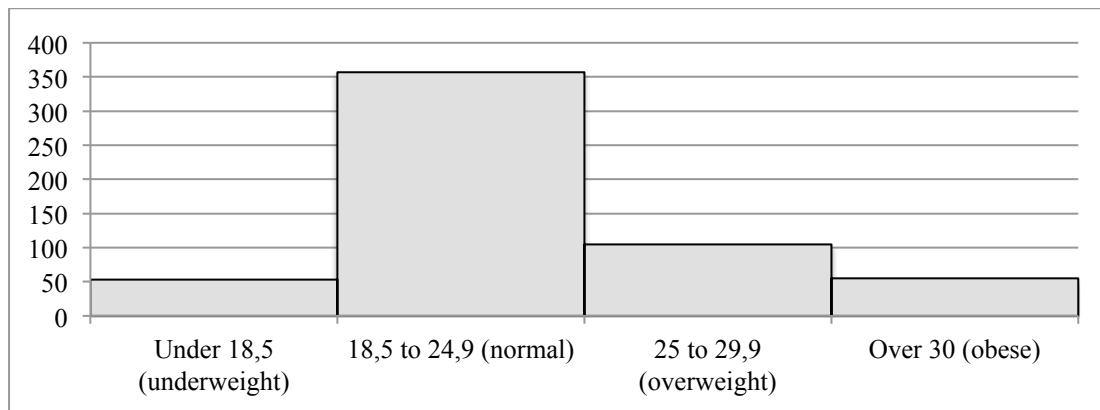
he was asleep after he had showed up at her domicile in the wee hours to hire her for sexual services, but the evidence against Lillian R. was insufficient to convict her. Before her incarceration at Angola, she had been charged at least once in the parish for violation of a city ordinance (probably related to prostitution or public disorder). After she left Angola, she was charged with conducting a disorderly house, but the case was nol-prossed, and another time with vagabondage and the case was dismissed¹¹⁸⁵. She then disappeared from public records.

The following figure shows that equivalent proportions of Black women were underweight or obese (respectively 9.2 percent and 9.6 percent) while overweight women represented 18.3 percent of the population, indicating that the nutritional status before their incarceration was not adequate for more than a third of the Black women admitted to LSP. As table L.2 (see Appendix L) reveals, the likelihood of being overweight or obese tended to increase with age. This observation made for Black female prisoners at LSP are consistent with observations made by scholars Carson and Komlos (see below). However, no trend could be observed in regards to birth cohorts¹¹⁸⁶. The distribution of BMI values for the Louisiana-born segment of the Black female population does not differ significantly from the whole group (see table L.1 in Appendix L). Considering that the size of the adult population examined here is limited (573 individuals only), and that no other data is available to document their health condition, it would be hazardous to draw conclusions only from the BMI.

¹¹⁸⁵ Entries #17170 & 17171, Volume 28, no. 16825-17500, 1926-1927, LSP Collection; Criminal Dockets #35,366 & #36,017, Louisiana Criminal District Court Orleans Parish, Collection VL350, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library; “Criminal District Court”, *The Times-Picayune*, October 3, 1931; “Criminal District Court”, *The Times-Picayune*, November 27, 1934.

¹¹⁸⁶ “The birth cohort estimates have some advantages insofar as social, economic, cultural and technological experiences of birth cohorts are more homogeneous than those of period cohorts. These experiences would have affected their life style, physical activity and food consumption more uniformly than that of measurement cohorts whose experiences were more heterogeneous with respect to the above independent variables. [...] Yet another reason to consider birth cohorts is that lifestyle habits and weight status acquired early in childhood tend to persist into adulthood.” Quote from: Komlos and Brabec, “The Trend of BMI Values of U.S. Adults by Deciles, Birth Cohorts 1882–1986 Stratified by Gender and Ethnicity”, 235.

Figure 8.2: Distribution of Black women's BMI values (1901-1935)



Source: Angola Women's Database

As a comparison, BMI values were low in the 19th century by today's standards, even for the upper class, as suggested by military cadets records¹¹⁸⁷. Studies have found that the BMI values declined at the turn of the 20th century, possibly because of the decline of the share of the population living on farms, who had a better access to nutritious diets and experienced fewer diseases. BMI data for the first half of the 20th century are sparse, but there is evidence that BMI values for people born after World War I increased, probably due to improvements in public health and the cut off of immigration to the U.S. (i.e. less poor and malnourished migrants arriving). Unfortunately, the Great Depression, because of its wide impact on the U.S. population, had reverse effects: high unemployment rates translated into a decline of food consumption, as is symbolized by Dorothea Lange's picture of Florence Thompson, the emaciated iconic migrant mother of the era. The fact that BMI values resumed their increase after World War II because of "the rise of a fast-food culture, the increase of television viewing and the new dominance of a generally more sedentary lifestyle" has been largely documented¹¹⁸⁸.

¹¹⁸⁷ Komlos and Brabec, "The Trend of BMI Values of U.S. Adults by Deciles, Birth Cohorts 1882–1986 Stratified by Gender and Ethnicity."

¹¹⁸⁸ Komlos and Carson, "The BMI Values of the Lower Classes Likely Declined during the Great Depression", 138.

Widespread obesity is therefore a recent phenomenon. It is also admitted that today's BMI values in the U.S. are among the highest in the developed world. See: Komlos and Brabec, "The Trend of BMI Values of U.S. Adults by Deciles, Birth Cohorts 1882–1986 Stratified by Gender and Ethnicity"; Today, 38 percent of the U.S. population is classified as obese. Ogden, et al. "Prevalence of Obesity Among Adults and Youth: United States, 2011–2014". Quoted in: Komlos and Carson, "The BMI Values of the Lower Classes Likely Declined during the Great Depression"; Recent research demonstrated that modern women are more likely to men to be obese and that modern Black women are more likely to be obese than their white counterparts. See: Flegal, et al., "Prevalence of Obesity

So far, very few studies have documented BMI values for African Americans. D.L. Costa demonstrated there were considerable differences between 19th century Black and white BMI values, and that Black people (who were generally smaller) had higher BMI rates than whites¹¹⁸⁹. John Komlos and Marek Brabec's longitudinal study showed that not only African Americans had different patterns than whites, but also that these patterns varied along gender lines:

During the first half of the [20th] century, [Black] men's rate of increase in BMI values [decreased] substantially and that of females [remained] constant at a relatively high level until World War II. After the war, though, the rate of change of BMI values of blacks came to resemble that of whites with an accelerating phase followed by a slowdown around the 1970s¹¹⁹⁰.

Carson's research based on 19th century Texas prison records shows that nutrition was good even among lower classes, and more specifically:

[...] black farmers had higher BMI values than workers in other occupations and were less likely to be in the underweight category. Greater farmer BMIs were due to close proximity with nutritious diets. Part of farmers' higher BMIs were probably related to physical activity, and BMIs represent an individual's composition between muscle and fat, which are related to physical activity, therefore, occupations. Occupations requiring greater physical activity decreased fat and increased muscle. [...] Black youths were slightly shorter than whites and more likely to be underweight, evidence of inferior physical environments for black children¹¹⁹¹.

Before post-World War II changes, BMI values varied greatly along gender lines as Carson reminds us:

Given US family calorie priorities, historical labor market specialization meant that more calories were devoted to men, who did a greater share of field work and consumed a larger share of household calories. Women's net nutritional needs were, therefore, queued behind men because men had greater physical strength and required more calories in labor market activity¹¹⁹².

and Trends in the Distribution of Body Mass Index among U.S. Adults, 1999–2010". Quoted in: Carson, "Socioeconomic Effects on the Stature of Nineteenth-Century US Women."

¹¹⁸⁹ Costa, "The Measure of Man and Older Age Mortality: Evidence from the Gould Sample". Quoted in: "Racial Differences in Body Mass Indices of Men Imprisoned in 19th Century Texas", 122.

¹¹⁹⁰ Komlos and Brabec, "The Trend of BMI Values of U.S. Adults by Deciles, Birth Cohorts 1882–1986 Stratified by Gender and Ethnicity", 234.

¹¹⁹¹ Carson, "Racial Differences in Body Mass Indices of Men Imprisoned in 19th Century Texas", 126.

¹¹⁹² Carson, "Black and White Female Body Mass Index Values in the Developing Late 19th and Early 20th Century United States", 310–11.

Carson's study of female prisoners at different state penitentiaries reveals that: "Between 1866 and 1939, the BMIs of African-American and white women were mostly unchanged"¹¹⁹³. Carson found little BMI variation for women within the U.S. by residence. He also observed that industrialization and agricultural commercialization created stagnating health conditions over the period between the Civil War and World War II. In Carson's study, nearly 71.4 percent of Black women and 66.0 percent of white women had a BMI considered as normal. Around 18.3 percent of Black women and 18.0 percent of white women were overweight, while 5.7 percent of Black women and 8.4 percent of white women were obese. Carson admitted that the percent of women in the underweight category was surprisingly low¹¹⁹⁴. In another study Carson and Komlos focused on male prisoners in the McNeil Island penitentiary (Washington State) during the Great Depression. They found out that three-quarters of their sample was in the normal weight category, another 21 percent was overweight, and only 4 percent was underweight or obese combined, which constituted a similar distribution to that found in other historical samples. Carson and Komlos also found out that the likelihood of an individual's being overweight or obese tended to increase with age, and that the probability of being overweight decreased significantly among the birth cohorts of the turn of the century¹¹⁹⁵. The observations that I made on Angola's Black women were consistent with these previous studies.

8.1.3 Physical marks

On admission, Black women were subject to a strip search. The admission clerk proceeded with a careful recording of their physical marks, including scars, wounds, moles, tattoos, and vaccination marks. The shape of their lips, nose, ears and head was often recorded as well as the

¹¹⁹³ Carson, 310–11.

¹¹⁹⁴ Carson, 315.

¹¹⁹⁵ Komlos and Carson, "The BMI Values of the Lower Classes Likely Declined during the Great Depression."

conditions of their teeth. Even pierced ears were recorded for women. As mentioned earlier, the authorities' objective for this recording was to be able to identify fugitives, although it also clearly served as an humiliating rite of passage for new prisoners, especially for (Black) women who had to expose themselves in front of (white) men (see chapter 4).

Historian Anne M. Butler examined several sets of prison admission records in the post-emancipation period. Her research reveals that women were “bearing the physical scars of their earlier lives”, namely slavery, with smaller sized because of malnutrition, massive injuries and wounds, missing teeth, etc.¹¹⁹⁶. Likewise, LSP admission records reveal the harsh conditions for Black women during Jim Crow. Over the period 1901-1935, 41.6 percent of the Black women admitted to LSP were described as bearing cut scars or burn scars large enough to be used to recognize them. The tables below suggest differences along birth cohort and occupation. A breakdown by birth cohort shows that larger proportions of Black women born in later decades present such marks on their body, which might be attributed either to a more systematic recording at admission or to the actual presence of more marks, suggesting more dangerous life conditions. (A breakdown by crime category does not show any significant differences.) A breakdown by occupation shows that domestic workers, in particular cooks, had larger proportion of such marks, suggesting that their scars could be the result of labor accidents, and more broadly that domestic labor entailed higher risks for workers than other occupations such as farm work. For instance, Augustine M., a single woman born in Mississippi, cook and housekeeper before her conviction for manslaughter, entered the penitentiary in 1934 at 27 years old with:

poor teeth, lower [teeth] mostly out, three gold crowns upper teeth, small mouth, thick lips, [a] large prominent nose, large protruding ears, [a] cut scar underneath right wrist, burn scars both legs on back of calf from heels to calves, [a] bullet scar in back lower right hip, [an] operation scar left side of abdomen, [she] claims no other body marks¹¹⁹⁷.

¹¹⁹⁶ Butler, “Still in Chains”, 23.

¹¹⁹⁷ Entry #25136, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935, LSP Collection. Her husband (whom she allegedly killed in self-defense after he had beaten her) might have inflicted some of her scars. Source: “Shoots Husband Through Heart With .32 Slug”, *Bogalusa Enterprise and American*, June 22, 1934.

Table 8.1: Number and percentage of Black women with cut scars & burn scars by birth cohort 1901-1935 (n=963)

	1870 (n=85)		1880 (n=217)		1890 (n=291)		1900 (n=246)		1910 (n=109)	
Presence of cut scars or burn scars	23	27.1%	75	34.6%	116	39.9%	126	51.2%	58	53.2%

Source: Angola Women's Database

Table 8.2: Number and percentage of Black women with cut scars & burn scars by occupation 1901-1935 (n=963)

	Cook (n=192)		House work (n=481)		Farm work (n=115)	
Presence of cut scars or burn scars	95	49.5%	194	40.3%	40	34.8%

Source: Angola Women's Database

Among the 963 Black women admitted to LSP over the period 1901-1935, 46 of them (4.8 percent) were recorded as either permanently handicapped, mutilated or bearing numerous scars. They were over-represented among the 31-40 year-old-age group (8.9 percent) and among women born in the 1860s and 1870s decades (respectively 27.3 and 8.2 percent). Twenty-three of these women were performing housework before their incarceration, nine others farm work, five were cook, another five were washwomen, and three were recorded as laborers. It is also noteworthy that eleven Black women (out of the 963 admitted) were recorded as wearing gun or stab wounds on their body, six of them having been convicted of a crime against persons, and the five others of a property offense. When Josephine R. was admitted to LSP in 1929 at 19 years old, her body already bore the marks of a rough life:

good teeth, one upper gold crown, small ears, long flat nose, thick lips, cut & sore scar right leg, vaccination scar right arm, two cut scars right elbow, large sore scar right elbow, small sore scar left elbow, tattoo "C.J." left arm. Cut & sore scar left wrist. long cut scar

above left wrist. three long cut scars top left hand. stab & cut scar left chest. cut scars right & left shoulder blades¹¹⁹⁸.

Convicted by the Orleans parish for robbery, with other women as accomplices, as her criminal records and newspaper accounts indicate, Josephine R. allegedly operated in New Orleans “back-of-town”’s alleyways to rob men of small amounts of money¹¹⁹⁹. Her dangerous lifestyle showed on her body. Likewise, Beatrice W.’s body kept traces of her misadventures in New Orleans’ “back-of-town”¹²⁰⁰. A “familiar figure in night court” (subtext for a sex worker), Beatrice W. was charged with the killing of another Black sex worker, with whom she was in cahoots to steal money from one of her white male clients. They had a conflict over the money robbed, and Beatrice’s accomplice in the larceny was killed. Admitted in December 1928 with several scars including a “shot scar [on her] left leg middleways between [her] hip and [her] knee”, Beatrice W. was “invalid since [her] incarceration”. She died the following August from tuberculosis at Angola¹²⁰¹.

Between 1901 and 1928, sixteen Black women were recorded as bearing scars from smallpox at the time of their admission to the penitentiary. One of them was Melinda H. who on her arrival in 1928 was recorded as bearing “numerous small pox scars on [her] face”. At 52 years old, Melinda H. served as “garden girl” at Camp D, a label that speaks to Black women’s denied womanhood through institutional language¹²⁰². Smallpox was very much a concern at the turn of the 20th century. It had been “one of the great killer diseases of the eighteenth century” and since the Civil War it was making a comeback in Louisiana¹²⁰³.

¹¹⁹⁸ Entry #19069, Volume 31, no. 18801-19450, 1929-1930, LSP Collection.

¹¹⁹⁹ “Says Negro Women Picked His Pocket”, *The Times-Picayune*, September 25, 1928; Docket #45,421, Louisiana Criminal District Court Orleans Parish, Collection VL350, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.

¹²⁰⁰ For a description of New Orleans back-of-town (often nicknamed “back-a-town”), see: Prince, *The Ballad of Robert Charles*, 28–29, 39–50.

¹²⁰¹ Entry #18397, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929, LSP Collection; “Woman Fatally Stabbed in Row”, *The Times-Picayune*, September 3, 1928.

¹²⁰² Entry # 18329, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929, LSP Collection.

¹²⁰³ Matas, *The Rudolph Matas History of Medicine in Louisiana*, 2:437.

Physical descriptions in penitentiary ledgers also contain mention of vaccination marks¹²⁰⁴. For instance, out of the 30 black women admitted in 1901, 20 had vaccination marks recorded by the penitentiary officials. The vaccination was most probably for smallpox, as it was the only one widely available at the time. In 1905, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld in the case of *Jacobson v. Massachusetts* the constitutionality of mandatory smallpox vaccination programs to preserve public health¹²⁰⁵. Smallpox vaccination campaigns took place in various spaces, such as schools or plantations, to prevent or limit outbreaks of the disease¹²⁰⁶. In Louisiana, some physicians had campaigned for compulsory vaccination as early as the 1870s, following a surge in the number of deaths. The surge was especially serious in New Orleans, where the disease was attributed to the large influx of a Black unvaccinated population from rural parishes to the city after Emancipation. Louisiana urban areas had managed to control the spread of smallpox by the end of World War I. However, minor outbreaks continued to plague the state almost until WWII, allegedly because of poor health care and education in rural areas¹²⁰⁷.

In 1901 a smallpox epidemic caused twelve deaths at Hurst's Camp (Bayou Lafourche), a male labor camp that was destroyed after the men were evacuated to Angola¹²⁰⁸. No doubt unsanitary and crowded conditions at 'convict camps' were favorable to the development and spreading of disease. All the same, at Angola, other diseases were of greater concern than smallpox, such as tuberculosis, malaria or syphilis (see section 8.6).

In addition to marks resulting from wounds and to birthmarks, Black women's tattoos were also recorded on penitentiary ledgers. Over the period 1901-1935, only twenty-seven of them (i.e. less than three percent) wore tattoos. Most of the tattoos were initials or names, presumably of a loved one. Some others had a heart, a bird, a cross, a flame, or else the traditional sailor tattoo motif of

¹²⁰⁴ Great variations in the ratio of women with vaccination marks over the period suggest that this information was not systematically recorded. It is therefore not a reliable indication of the extent of vaccination campaigns during the whole period.

¹²⁰⁵ The College of Physicians of Philadelphia, *The History of Vaccines, Timeline*, online: <https://www.historyofvaccines.org/> Consulted July 26, 2021.

¹²⁰⁶ *The Times-Picayune*, January 18, 1901.

¹²⁰⁷ Matas, *The Rudolph Matas History of Medicine in Louisiana*, 2:440, 444.

¹²⁰⁸ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. See Report of the physicians, pages 41-49. "A Tempest in a Tea-Pot", *The Times-Picayune*, January 5, 1901.

an anchor. Very rare were the women wearing more than one tattoo. One of them, Lillian F., had a naked woman on her left upper arm, a heart on her left forearm, a cupid on her right forearm, and a “tattoo straight mark above [her] left knee”¹²⁰⁹. Lillian F.’s body kept traces of her love affairs, as well as of her rough encounters. According to the press, she had been jailed “a hundred times” before being convicted of “cutting and wounding with intent to commit murder,” a conviction that landed her at Angola. Her judicial history included numerous convictions for assault and battery, oftentimes against other Black women. She was “reputed to have numbers of scars as evidence of the many fights in which she has figured”. The penitentiary ledger lists a “scar under lip, scar right side forehead, cut scars (8) left arm upper [...] cut scar left forearm”. Her body might also have kept traces of her numerous arrests and bad treatment in jail since she allegedly stayed out of jail “just long enough to get back in” and was probably kept under close eye by the East Baton Rouge police¹²¹⁰.

8.1.4 Teeth

The condition of new prisoners’ teeth was recorded upon admission, but only systematically from 1920 through 1935. Over that period, 85 percent of Black women were recorded with ‘even’, ‘fair’, ‘fairly good’, ‘fine’, ‘good’ or ‘pretty good’ teeth, while 11.1 percent were recorded with ‘bad’, ‘poor’, or ‘false’ teeth. However, as could be expected in a pre-fluoride period, the condition of their teeth worsened with age: 22.4 percent of Black women in the 31-40 age group and 40 percent in the 41-50 were recorded with bad teeth. No significant difference was noted according to the offense category, suggesting similar living conditions for all Black women before their admission to LSP.

¹²⁰⁹ Entry #26279, Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936, LSP Collection.

¹²¹⁰ “Woman Is Stabbed by Another on Street”, *State Times Advocate*, July 21, 1930; “Lillian F. in Jail Again for 100th Time”, *State Times Advocate*, September 27 1932; “Seventy Five are Arraigned Today Here”, *State Times Advocate*, October 6 1932; “Arrests Pass 50 Mark for Lillian in Fight”, *Morning Advocate*, August 30, 1933; “Lillian F. is Jailed Again in Cutting Case”, *State Times Advocate*, August 20, 1935; “Woman Cut in Fight with Lillian F. Treated at Hospital”, *Morning Advocate*, August 21, 1935.

Moreover, during the period 1901-1935, a third of Black women admitted at LSP had gold teeth or gold crowns (32.1 percent). A breakdown by alleged crime shows a higher proportion of Black women with gold teeth or crowns among those accused of crimes against persons than among property offenders (respectively 34.9 percent and 27.3 percent), which might suggest slightly better economic conditions among the first group. As could be expected, the proportion of women wearing gold teeth increased with age (see table below). Only a very limited number of women over 41 years old are recorded with gold teeth or crowns, but this age group was scarcely represented among the incarcerated, which makes the data insignificant.

Table 8.3: Distribution of Black women with gold teeth or crowns by age group

Age group	Gold teeth or crowns		Total number of women
	Number	%	
12 to 15	1	5.0%	20
16 to 21	88	23.6%	373
22 to 30	161	39.7%	409
31 to 40	49	39.8%	123
41 to 50	9	29.0%	31
over 51	1	16.7%	6
Total	309	32.1%	963

Source: Angola Women's Database

The fact that even women in their teens had gold teeth or gold crowns could be indicative of their poor dental health. It could also be the mark of the habit of placing one's savings in one's own mouth, at a time when financial institutions might not have been accessible to working-class African Americans. Gold teeth have also been a matter of style for African Americans¹²¹¹. A present-day commentator describes the importance for Black people of gold teeth and grillz (a decorative piece placed on top of teeth) as a "metaphor of having a piece of the American dream for a people who the dream was never promised to"¹²¹². During Jim Crow, Jack Johnson, the first Black heavyweight boxing champion, "flaunted gold teeth that went with his gold-handled

¹²¹¹ "Gold Teeth Are Beautiful on Their Own Terms", by Julian Randall, *The Atlantic*, September 16, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/09/beauty-gold-teeth/619972/> Accessed August 15, 2022.

¹²¹² "Grillz: An Oral History of a Fly Accessory", by Jamé Jackson, *In The Know*, August 5, 2020. <https://www.intheknow.com/post/grillz-history-black-people/> Accessed March 4, 2022.

walking stick”. Famous for his flamboyant lifestyle, Johnson was very much considered a hero by the Black community during Jim Crow. His fights against white boxers inspired controversy and sometimes rioting among whites who did not appreciate the Black champion’s victories and his bragging¹²¹³.

8.2 Age and the passing of time at LSP

Black women’s age on admission ranged from 12 to 63 years old. Over the period 1901-1935, the average age at admission was 24.8 years old for Black women and 29 for white women, while their median age at admission was respectively 23 and 26. An analysis by decade shows an increase in age for Black women over the period, while there was a decrease for white women. On discharge, Black women were 26.9 years old on average, whereas white women were 31, because Black women spent more years than their white counterparts at LSP (see tables below).

Table 8.4: Black women’s age average on admission and on discharge by decade of admission (n=962)

Decade of admission	Number of women	Age on admission	Age on discharge	Age difference
1901-1909	200	23.7	26.0	2.4
1910-1919	276	23.4	25.2	1.8
1920-1929	264	25.8	28.1	2.3
1930-1939	222	26.2	28.4	2.2
Total	962	24.8	26.9	2.1

Source: Angola Women’s Database

¹²¹³ “Johnson boxed, lived on own terms”, <https://www.espn.com/sportsculture/features/00014275.html> Accessed August 15, 2022. In 1920, Jack Johnson would served a sentence at the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth for violation of the Mann Act. The charge was brought against him because of his marriage to a white woman.

Table 8.5: white women's age average on admission and on discharge by decade of admission (n=93)

Decade of admission	Number	Age on admission	Age on discharge	Age difference
1901-1909	14	33.2	36.8	3.6
1910-1919	18	31.8	33.3	1.5
1920-1929	25	27.0	28.6	1.5
1930-1939	36	27.4	29.3	1.9
Total	93	29.0	31.0	2.0

Source: Angola Women's Database

In addition, more young women were incarcerated than young men in proportion (probably in part because there were juvenile institutions for males and not for females). For instance, the biennial report of 1938-1940 shows that 20.3 percent of the 133 women present on December 31, 1939 were 19 years old or younger (compared to 13.5 percent of men). Conversely, older women were less represented than men: only 15.8 percent of them were 35 years old or older (compared to 25.3 percent of men)¹²¹⁴.

According to Helen Bryan who was incarcerated at Alderson, the federal women's reformatory:

The younger girls were more optimistic than the older ones because they could dream about all the long years ahead of them on the outside. But for the older ones the question of time was grim and forbidding. They had lived their best years. If, when they went out, they had to work, a job would be difficult to find and to hold. If they had a family to return to, their humiliation could be sharp and they feared public censure¹²¹⁵.

Unlike in today's prisons¹²¹⁶, during Jim Crow, aging in prison was a challenge for only a small portion of the women. Indeed, as the following table shows, two thirds of them spent less than two years in custody.

¹²¹⁴ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC, 32.

¹²¹⁵ Bryan, *Inside*, 241.

¹²¹⁶ "Nothing But Time: Elderly Americans Serving Life Without Parole", by Ashley Nellis, *The Sentencing Project*. June 23, 2022. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/nothing-but-time-elderly-americans-serving-life-without-parole/> Accessed August 15, 2022.

Table 8.6: Number of days served by women admitted 1901-1935 (women who died in custody or who were transferred to another institution were excluded)

Time served inside	Black women (n=936)		white women (n=93)	
	Number	%	Number	%
364 days or less	370	39.5%	38	40.1%
365-729 days	255	27.4%	26	27.9%
730-1,824 days	213	22.7%	18	19.3%
1,825-3,649 days	71	7.6%	8	8.6%
3,650 days and more	27	2.9%	3	3.2%

Source: Angola Women's Database

Nevertheless, incarcerated women attempted to preserve their youth despite the harsh conditions their bodies were subjected to on a daily basis. It seems that it might have been easier to do so after the 1951 heel slashing incident, as it prompted a renewal of the management team who in turn conducted a series of modernizations at Angola. In December 1953, prisoners were advocating for the opening of a beauty school at the women's camp in the pages of *The Angolite*:

Such a school might turn out finished products in the women themselves, and graduate a class of experienced operators both colored and white. That access to a manicure and such other feminine necessities would bring a big boost to the morale of the unit goes without saying¹²¹⁷.

Less than two years later, “a completely equipped beauty shop with a side each for colored and white patrons [...] [was] built following a suggestion of the Angolite”¹²¹⁸. These two excerpts suggest that the beauty shop was perhaps an idea coming from the newspaper's misogynist editor rather than a demand from the women themselves. Nevertheless, the initiative could happen because penitentiary authorities adhere to a vision of women in which their physical appearance was acknowledged as an important part of their social identity¹²¹⁹. A later edition of *The Angolite* contains a fake advertisement for Camp D's new beauty shop, nicknamed “Belinda's Beauty Bazaar at Camp D,” probably after the name of one of the female prisoners. “Exclusively for women”, the beauty shop is represented by an illustration of what appear to be two white women wearing dresses and heels, i.e. not the typical Angola prisoner, with the comment: “Now you can startle your old man overnight! Blondes become red-heads... red-heads become blondes... all in

¹²¹⁷ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 38, December 5, 1953.

¹²¹⁸ *The Angolite*, March 12, 1955.

¹²¹⁹ Ricordeau, *Les détenus et leurs proches*, 203.

one simple, painless operation! Why not come in and cut up a few friends”¹²²⁰? Did the Black section of the Beauty Bazaar become a space for Black incarcerated women to gather, to share gossip and news, and to form bonds while having their hair done in the way that Black-owned beauty parlors have been in the outside world? Or did it stay under state control too much to allow it to become a Black-controlled space¹²²¹?

Whatever the outcome of this experiment, it seems that it was only short-lived. A 1958 document states that: “the equipment is here and not in use”. Angola female workers and male workers’ wives were probably envious of the beauty shop female prisoners had had at their disposition. One hundred and six “free” women, calling themselves the “ladies of Angola”, petitioned the Director of Institutions to obtain a beauty shop for themselves¹²²². And the female prisoners’ needs were forgotten once again.

8.3 Bodily impacts of the incarceration regime

As previous chapters made clear, material conditions of confinement were deplorable at Angola. However, this was not exceptional for a southern prison during Jim Crow. Indeed, firsthand accounts provided by people incarcerated in other southern carceral spaces confirm this situation:

cramped, overcrowded and unsanitary bunkhouses and cells plagued with rats and cockroaches; filthy bedding and stinking clothing crawling with lice; constant noise and lack of sleep; scarce toiletries [...]; and the monotonous and limited prison diet that was heavy in beans and pork products but lacking in vitamin-rich fish, fruit and vegetables and frequently included rancid and stale food¹²²³.

¹²²⁰ *The Angolite*, December 31, 1955.

¹²²¹ Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 113, 129.

¹²²² Document untitled, undated, folder 1958, Collection P1981-495, Louisiana State Penitentiary Correspondence 1952-1964, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹²²³ Miller, “Reflections on the Chain Gang and Prison Narratives from the Southern United States”, 256.

The combination of poor food and lack of hygiene already made staying healthy in confinement challenging. In addition, the prison labor regime imposed heavy pressure on prisoners' bodies. In November 1917, Governor Ruff Golso Pleasant invited delegates at the American Prison Association meeting in New Orleans "to visit the great plantation at Angola, where you will see Louisiana convicts working in the open air, where they may become healthier, and in the development of health develop themselves mentally and morally"¹²²⁴. Despite his claim that coerced labor made prisoners healthier, there is ample evidence that in reality, coerced labor had great negative impacts on prisoners' bodily integrity. Black women were not spared the long hours of physically demanding work (see chapter 7). Most might have experienced exhaustion from these extreme working conditions, many might have suffered wounds, and some might even have suffered permanent disabilities¹²²⁵. In short, manual coerced labor acted as "a kind of corporal punishment for crime" deteriorating prisoners' health prematurely and compromising their bodily integrity¹²²⁶.

In addition to the long hours, the drudgery of the tasks, and challenging weather conditions such as extreme heat and humidity or heavy rains, the lash was frequently employed to enforce discipline in the fields, as well as in other labor settings on the penitentiary-plantation. However, purported "laziness" was far from being the only motive for corporal punishment. When penologist Frank Tannenbaum visited LSP in 1924, he obtained from penitentiary authorities a list of punishable offenses (see table below). In this list, infringements concerning labor (i.e. laziness, inferior work or feigning to be sick) were susceptible to punishment at the same level than minor offenses. This contrasts with first-hand accounts (such as William Sadler's writings previously cited) from which we understand that prisoners were frequently and severely punished for not being productive enough and that punishment often took place in the fields or wherever else they worked (for instance the cannery).

¹²²⁴ "Governor Urges Delegates Visit Penal Plantation", *The Times-Picayune*, November 23, 1917.

¹²²⁵ According to former prisoner William Sadler, corporal punishment, dangerous work conditions combined to a lack of medical care resulted in many wounds (including permanent disabilities such as his own deafness), illnesses and even deaths among prisoners. Source: "Hell on Angola", *The New Orleans Item*, July 14, 1943.

¹²²⁶ Sellin, *Slavery and the Penal System*, 178.

Table 8.7: Punishable offenses at LSP, 1924

Infringement to prison rules	Punishment
Laziness	8-10 lashes with a strap
Impudence	10-12 " " " "
Insolence	8-10 " " " "
Disobedience	10-12 " " " "
Fighting	10-15 " " " "
Inferior work	8-10 " " " "
Stabbing	15-20 " " " "
Destroying property	10-12 " " " "
Attempting to escape	20-30 " " " "
Escaping	20-40 " " " "
Feigning sick	8-10 " " " "
Disturbance in cell room	10-15 " " " "
Using bad language	10-12 " " " "
Sodomy	10-20 " " " "
Other minor offenses	8-10 " " " "

Source: Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases of the South*, 107.

In addition, Tannenbaum listed “other punishable offenses”, which speak to the level of scrutiny even the most trivial every day activities were subjected to:

Altering clothing, Singing, Whistling, Talking, Creating a disturbance, Failure to make satisfactory progress at school, Gazing at visitors, Having papers when not in cell, Inattention, Laughing and fooling, Losing an article of clothing, Quarreling, Neglect to obey laundry rules, Soiling books, Replying when corrected, Using improper language, Profanity, Vulgarity, General crookedness, Breach of trust, Immoral acts or conversations of any nature, Laziness, Misrepresentation, Other offensive acts, Smoking cigarettes, Bed not properly made, Clothing not in order, Communication by signs, Dilatory Hands in pockets, Hair not combed¹²²⁷.

¹²²⁷ Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases of the South*, 108–9.

The following table summarizes the disciplinary incidents concerning women found in the penitentiary archives. It is based on information gathered from two distinct sources covering two periods of a few years each¹²²⁸.

¹²²⁸ For the first period, I used the Volume 14 of LSP records, entitled “Conduct Record”, the only surviving volume of a series of conduct records. It provides information on punishments inflicted to about 1,600 LSP prisoners, including 56 women (55 being African American women, 1 a white woman), or about 3.5 percent (the same as the proportion of women in the LSP carceral population). The first entry for each of the prisoners who were punished corresponds to an incident between May 1908 and February 1913, and the last recorded incident for a woman was a punishment inflicted in August 1915. Since the volume was filled using both the chronology of punishments and the prisoner institutional numbers, and since other volumes are missing, it is impossible to know how many incidents were recorded for all prisoners admitted over the same period or the rate of individuals concerned by punishment. Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection.

For the second period, I used individual information available for every woman admitted between 1925-1935 in the Convict Records. The first punishment was recorded in July 1925, and the last one in April 1944. Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923; Volume 25, no. 14603-15500, 1923-1925; Volume 26, no. 15501-16150, 1926; Volume 27, no. 16151-16824, 1925-1926; Volume 28, no. 16825-17500, 1926-1927; Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928; Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929; Volume 31, no. 18801-19450, 1929-1930; Volume 32, no. 19451-20100, 1930; Volume 33, no. 20101-20749, 1930-1931; Volume 34, no. 20751-21399, 1931; Volume 35, no. 21401-22050, 1931-1932; Volume 36, no. 22051-22699, 1932; Volume 37, no. 22701-23350, 1932-1933; Volume 38, no. 23351-23999, 1933; Volume 39, no. 24001-24650, 1933-1934; Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935; Volume 41, no. 25301-25950, 1935; Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936, LSP Collection.

Table 8.8: Number of discipline incidents recorded concerning LSP female prisoners

	First period (1908-1915)		Second period (1925-1935)	
	Number of incidents involving Black women	Number of incidents involving white women	Number of incidents involving Black women	Number of incidents involving white women
Disobedience	13		8	
Escaping	4		7	1
Fighting	45	1	21	3
Laziness	7		6	
Mail related	2		3	2
Misbehavior	13		6	
“Ratting”	2			
Stealing	4		1	1
Threatening	23		9	4
Total number of incidents recorded	113	1	61	11
Total number of women involved	55	1	45	9
Average number of incidents per woman	2.1	1	1.4	1.2

Source: Angola Women’s Database

Over the first period (1908-1915) more than half of the women “disciplined” were punished only once, while a quarter of them were punished twice. A few women received more than two punishments, including one woman who received up to eight punishments and another who received nine punishments. Within two years, Rose W. was whipped seven times for fighting (see later) and another for participating in a collective action (see intro). As for Susie L., she was punished five times for fighting, twice for disobedience, once for misbehaviour (“cursing”) and another one for writing a letter for a fellow prisoner who was unable to read or write. All punishments consisted of whipping, except for two incidents. On May 21, 1912, two Black women, Emma S. and Susie L. were chained to bed for disobedience, a barbaric and humiliating

treatment that did not reappear later in the penitentiary records. They were also the only recorded punishments inflicted to women by Captain Barrow, who might not have been the regular “boss” at Camp D and might have “improvise” this punishment he probably considered appropriate for rebellious women. Women were often considered more troublesome than men by prison staff who subjected them to more severe and frequent punishment¹²²⁹. Over the first period (1908-1915), only one white female prisoner’s punishment was recorded. In April 1909, Georgia W. was shut up in a potato bunk and fed with bread and water for two days for “drawing a stick” on another white woman and threatening her. Whipping was not deemed appropriate when women were white (see chapter 5 and see below for a comment on this)¹²³⁰.

Over the period 1925-1935, a total of 382 Black women were admitted, and punishments were recorded for 45 of these women (i.e. 11.8 percent, which is consistent with Hermann’s findings mentioned below). Thirty-three of them were punished only once, while 9 were punished twice, 2 received 3 punishments and one was punished 4 times. Black women convicted of crimes against property were punished as much as those convicted of crimes against persons (they represented 40 percent of discipline incidents compared to 34 percent of all admission, whereas women convicted of crimes against persons were 60 percent of the women punished and 62.6 percent of all admissions). Conversely, 9 were punished out of a total of 49 white women admitted over 1925-1935 (i.e. 18.4 percent). All but two were punished only once. The rate of discipline incidents was therefore higher for white women admitted over 1925-1935, although it is important to remember that the nature of the punishment was very different for women of both groups: no white woman received corporal punishment, at least according to the records.

The following table reproduces some of Christina Hermann’s data on punishment at Angola. Hermann examines all admissions for the years 1927, 1929, 1931, 1933 and 1935. Her data suggests that the rate of recidivists as well as the overcrowding of the penitentiary (particularly critical during the Great Depression) might have been one of the factors that influenced the rate of corporal punishments inflicted.

¹²²⁹ See for instance: Dodge, ““One Female Prisoner Is of More Trouble than Twenty Males””; Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*, chap. 7.

¹²³⁰ Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection. Pages 485, 534, 577, 753. Entry #4628, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection.

Table 8.9: Rate of recidivism and rate of punishment for selected years at LSP

Year	Number of admissions	Percentage of recidivists among new admissions	Percentage of individuals who received corporal punishment
1927	749	9%	31%
1929	878	14%	38%
1931	1,316	19%	40%
1933	1,163	25%	38%
1935	1,115	31%	35%

Source: Hermann, “Specters of Freedom: Forced Labor, Social Struggle, and the Louisiana State Penitentiary System, 1835-1935”, Table B.9, “Prior Convictions of Prisoners by Year Received at Louisiana State Penitentiary, 1927, 1929, 1931, 1933, 1935”, 447; Table B.19, “Corporal Punishment Statistics for Prisoners by Year Received at Louisiana State Penitentiary, 1927, 1929, 1931, 1933, 1935”, 456.

Still according to Hermann’s data, Black men were the most punished, with 47 percent of Black males admitted receiving corporal punishment, whereas this was true of only 23 percent for white men, and 14 percent for Black women. At least according to the records, guards abstained from whipping white women altogether. In addition to being whipped more than their white counterparts, Hermann finds that Black prisoners were often punished more severely, receiving larger numbers of lash counts¹²³¹. Hermann’s findings on discipline are consistent with historian Alex Tepperman’s conclusions. Working with a random sample of 2,398 individuals (men and women) admitted to LSP between 1919-1935, Tepperman notes a total of 1,817 infractions of prison rules (i.e. an average of 0.75 infractions per prisoner). However, there was a remarkable distinction between Black prisoners - who comprised 84.3 percent of the infractions while making up approximately three-fifths of the prison population - and white prisoners - who received three times less punishment in proportion¹²³².

¹²³¹ Hermann, “Specters of Freedom”, 407–9, 460; A recent study demonstrates that Black and Indigenous people currently receive disproportionate disciplinary writeups in the North Carolina state prison system. Becker, “Racial Bias and Prison Discipline: A Study of North Carolina State Prisons.”

¹²³² Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows”, 237 (note 94), 251 (table 5.6).

From these observations, it appears that race was the factor that influenced punishment the most. To be sure, there were several proposals to abolish corporal punishment in the Louisiana carceral system, but they were rejected precisely because Black prisoners constituted the majority of the carceral population. For instance, in 1915, an investigating committee recommended that: “some other form of punishment than corporal punishment by the use of the lash should be found”, arguing that:

To the man of a rebellious disposition the lash does more harm than good, for he nurses a secret grievance against his tormentor which abides with him and unfits him for the work to which he has been assigned. To the timid and tractable man, the lash is unnecessary, as a stern reprimand or mild form of punishment always has the desired effect¹²³³.

Yet, time and again, penitentiary authorities resisted pressure and maintained the brutality: it was deemed the most appropriate management method to rule the prison population. For instance, General manager Fuqua indicated his desire to abolish the system of flogging, however he suggested that it was impractical because: “With our large percentage of negro population and ignorant negroes at that, I doubt if any other system would maintain discipline as well”¹²³⁴. According to historian David Oshinski, “Arkansas, Texas, Florida, and Louisiana all used the lash on their convicts without serious public opposition. It was part of the regional culture, and most prisoners were black”¹²³⁵. It was also the case in Mississippi, where the penal farm Parchman functioned as a penitentiary-plantation in very similar ways than Angola.

However race alone cannot explain the differential treatment received by prisoners belonging to different categories. Through the intersectional approach adopted here, we can better acknowledge the intersection of race and gender as factors determining the punishment inflicted to LSP prisoners. Black women were punished less frequently than Black male prisoners were at Angola (presumably because they were women). However, it is by looking at white women’s records that the incidence of race combined with gender clearly appears: white women formed a distinct category of prisoners who were not subjected to the same brutal treatment.

¹²³³ “Report of the Legislative Investigating Commission of Louisiana to Hon. Luther Hall, Governor of Louisiana, August 2nd, 1915”. Quoted in: Hermann, “Specters of Freedom”, 380.

¹²³⁴ The Prison Association of New York, “The Angola Sugar Plantation Prison Farm of Louisiana”, *The Delinquent* 7, no. 11 (November 1917), 15. Quoted in: Hermann, “Specters of Freedom”, 380.

¹²³⁵ Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery*, 149.

White prison staff members actually benefitted from the violence they inflicted on LSP prisoners. In her study of the Alabama female prison conducted in 1951, Ida Ann Harper argues that: “Punishment not only put them [prisoners] in their places but puts the staff in its place. In fact, it redefines the entire social structure which places the staff in a position to inflict punishment on an inmate”¹²³⁶. Likewise, at Angola, the brutality employed by penitentiary staff served to enforce racial and gendered hierarchies between prisoners and “free” people (as well as among prisoners of different groups).

Under an order issued at the hand of warden D.D. Bazer, dated August 8, 1940, each camp captain was given full power and authority over his unit. A few years later, a commentator stated:

The order, in effect, gave official sanction to what the captains had already had: the absolute power of life and death over the inmates. The captain is the man to order whether the inmate should be punished with the “bat” – corporally – or by any other means. He is generally the man who wields the “bat”. There is no appeal once the sentence is passed – whether the inmate is right or wrong, he is punished just the same¹²³⁷.

According to an observer, camp captains had all power and authority over their prisoners, and did not hesitate to abuse this impunity: “These captains ‘held court’ and meted out punishment, as they saw fit with very little interference from higher authority. The individual camps functioned much as individual operations”¹²³⁸. The distance between camps within the penitentiary-plantation allowed for decentralization (a fact that probably reinforced by the absence of higher officials on the penal farm until the closing of the “Walls” in Baton Rouge in 1932). Indeed:

Since the camps are thoroughly de-centralized, each has its own peculiar set of rules and customs, some having their derivation from custom, others from orders of the individual captains. Mail, for instance, at one camp is given out every day – at another camp three times a week, and so on. What might be a violation of a rule at one camp might not be at another, and so on. This total lack of centralization of authority is one of the greatest drawbacks for harmony in the prison. Where one camp might quit working at sundown,

¹²³⁶ Harper, “A Study of the ‘Natural Groups’ within a Woman’s Correctional Institution”, 37.

¹²³⁷ Proposal for a survey at Angola, undated (ca.1944?), Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.1, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans. Quote on page 5.

¹²³⁸ LeBlanc, “Selected Limitations on the Organization of Treatment in a ‘Modern’ Prison”, 29.

the other, in order to finish a particular piece of ground, might work much longer. Arising and working hours in the morning likewise vary from unit to unit¹²³⁹.

This confirms that despite a high degree of institutionalization, relationships between captives and captors were also subject to forms of personal power, where captors had latitude to enforce arbitrary decisions. In turn, this high degree of arbitrary authority induced terror among captives, since arbitrary punishments, humiliations, insults and sexual violence could happen at any time¹²⁴⁰. According to several observers, one of the major impediments to ending brutal treatment of prisoners was the culture shared by most staff members who had been working for LSP for a number of years. For instance, Captain S.H. Richardson arrived in 1900, stayed for ten years, left and came back in 1929. In 1944, when he answered the questions of an investigation committee chaired by Archbishop Rummel, he had 24 years of seniority and was in charge of Camp C, where Black male prisoners were held¹²⁴¹:

Captain Richardson: Sometimes I brush them up a little bit. You have to make them mind. They're just like a bunch of children. They don't want to do it, but sometimes you have to. I had a boy the other morning hit another boy on the side of the head with a spade, and broke his ear drum, and another broke another's ribs. I got the leather out and strapped them. They had a fight in the cell room. He slapped that boy beside the head and busted his ear drum, They reported to me the next morning, so I took him right in the dining room and brushed him off a little.

Rummel: How many wallops did you give him?

Richardson: About fifteen on his bare back.

Rummel: Did you show any marks?

Richardson: No marks. I have a leather about as wide as my four fingers. It's about thirty inches long and it has a handle.

Rummel: How often do you find it necessary to use it?

Richardson: It's the first time I used it in six months. I used it on these two cases¹²⁴².

Captain Richardson did not simply use the lash to "brush" prisoners "a little bit". By his own admission, he also resorted to other torture methods:

Richardson: Sometimes I put them on the post for about twelve hours on a stretch, sometimes through the night. That don't do him no good.

¹²³⁹ Proposal for a survey at Angola, undated (ca.1944?), Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.1, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans. Quote on page 6.

¹²⁴⁰ Scott, *La Domination et les arts de la résistance*, 11.

¹²⁴¹ 1944 Hearings, 171 and following.

¹²⁴² 1944 Hearings, 175.

Rummel: Do you leave them up all through the night?
Richardson: Yes, sir; sometimes.
Rummel: What condition do you find him in in the morning when you take him down?
Richardson: He's ready to behave himself¹²⁴³.

Archbishop Rummel questioned this method: "If you compelled any individual to stand in one position, that would hurt. In four or five hours, I don't see how they could stand it". Nonetheless, Dr. Smith, another member of the investigation committee commented: "I don't think that is so severe as it sounds. Our soldiers are often required to stand at attention for two hours to two hours and a half. [...] If we are going to object to that, we are going to object to the Army training"¹²⁴⁴. But one male prisoner had told a committee member that people had been attached to the post for "from forty-eight to seventy-two hours", making it far more strenuous than what any army training would impose on soldiers' bodies¹²⁴⁵. On the other hand, Father Lewis E. Marionneaux, the penitentiary Catholic chaplain, dismissed the painful aspect of this "substitute for flogging" by advancing another fallacious comparison. When asked if that was "rather hard on a man", he stated: "Well, in the schools we used to stand them up with a dunce cap on"¹²⁴⁶.

Also by his own admission, Captain Richardson breached the penitentiary rules by not reporting the punishment of Camp C prisoners to the penitentiary authorities:

Moak: In the case of a strapping like you gave to these two men, do you make any report on it to the Warden?
Richardson: No, sir; I'm supposed to, but I don't do it¹²⁴⁷.

Asked by the committee if he had resorted to other methods of punishment, Captain Richardson admitted that whipping was what he believed the most efficient:

Rummel: Did you ever try cutting down on the food when a fellow didn't behave well?
Richardson: Yes, I have, but the other n... will feed him though. It ain't going to hurt them. I was whipped in school. It ain't going to hurt them. I don't bust their skin, but you've got to brush them a little bit or they'll run you away.

¹²⁴³ 1944 Hearings, 176.

¹²⁴⁴ 1944 Hearings, 19-20.

¹²⁴⁵ 1944 Hearings, 77.

¹²⁴⁶ 1944 Hearings, 133. The position of Catholic chaplain was created by act of the 1940 Legislature, and Father Lewis E. Marionneaux was assigned by the archdiocese of New Orleans. Source: "New Prison Chaplain Will Assume Duty", *The Times-Picayune*, July 12, 1941.

¹²⁴⁷ 1944 Hearings, 180.

Rummel: You feel that is the only way of taming them?
Richardson: That does it quicker than anything¹²⁴⁸.

The culture of brutality persisted through successive political changes and warden appointments, mainly because the same employees stayed at Angola for a long time. In fact, “a well-established hierarchy of resident free families in effect controlled the prison and its operations, handling down jobs from generation to generation”¹²⁴⁹. Some long-term staff members abused their power in total impunity, such as Captain William Montgomery - employed from 1912 into the 1940s - who was “involved, directly or indirectly, in several killings and a score or more of maimings. He is known as “Brutal Bill” by the inmates”¹²⁵⁰. In 1944, Captain William Montgomery was at retirement age, but there was no provision for a pension (unlike for federal correctional employees), so the illiterate man stayed in charge and continued abusing prisoners¹²⁵¹.

According to a former white male prisoner at Camp E, the brutality was employed to “utterly subdue” prisoners. He felt like “the idea of ever having been a human being and not a dumb beast of burden” was literally “beaten out of him”. However, the brutality he was victim of while working in the fields was never recorded in his file¹²⁵². This was probably the case for a good proportion of the punishments inflicted on male and female prisoners, both Black and white.

The various captains who took charge of the female captives employed these brutal methods at the women’s camp. For instance, during the period May 1908-February 1913, even as the female population oscillated between 50 and 72 individuals, the successive captains in charge of Camp D recorded more than a hundred punishments, i.e. an average of once every two weeks and a half¹²⁵³.

¹²⁴⁸ 1944 Hearings, 183.

¹²⁴⁹ C. Murray Henderson, warden 1968-1975, quoted in: Hamilton and Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary*, 30.

¹²⁵⁰ “Hell on Angola”, by William Sadler, *The New Orleans Item*, July 16, 1943.

¹²⁵¹ 1944 Hearings, 171.

¹²⁵² “Torture Factory”, by Jon Edgar Webb, 1941, Vertical Files, Hogan Archive of New Orleans Music and New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University Special Collections, New Orleans. Entry #13928, Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923, LSP Collection.

¹²⁵³ Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection.

During most of the 1930s, Camp D captain was Jesse M. Willis, and his wife Leola Willis assumed the charge of matron. A native of Columbia, La., Willis was previously bookkeeper for a lumber company and school teacher, two occupations which had little in common with prison work. Willis was hired to replace C. Lee Kleinpeter, who himself was discharged (for an unknown reason) by J.E. McClanahan, a member of the Louisiana legislature who assumed the charge of warden for a year before he had to resign following a judgement of the Supreme Court forbidding the plurality of state offices¹²⁵⁴. Willis also supervised operations at the cannery where women were employed. There, according to a male prisoner's account, Willis "would use the 'bat' himself, often beating a woman, white or Negro, on the breast or stomach"¹²⁵⁵. In front of the press however, Willis attempted to minimize his use of brutality against prisoners: "I have occasionally whipped an obstreperous Negro woman because that was always the policy and I had to do it occasionally to be able even to stay at the camp. But I have never broken the skin or drawn blood with a flogging"¹²⁵⁶. Interestingly, in that interview Willis denied beating any white woman (which could be controversial with the public), and justified beating Black women because it was institutional policy. He also pretended that his violence was necessary to assert his power over his captives. "How else could a small group of armed men be expected to hold and rule another much larger group except through fear?", asked George Jackson of his captors in a California prison a few decades later¹²⁵⁷. His question seems valid for Angola's Camp D as well.

In 1941, Captain Willis and his wife were replaced by another captain who:

carried a black-jack. He was deathly afraid of the Amazons in his charge. And one Sunday, observing what he surmised was a 'threatening' manner in one of the white women, brutally slugged her with the weapon. She had to be carried to the camp hospital. [He] also caused to be constructed a 'dog house' at the rear of the camp which was built like a sweat box. In this were placed, for varying lengths of time up to 48 hours, women whom he thought were recalcitrant. Another favorite [of his] punishment was strapping women up by their wrists to a beam. [He] was eventually discharged after repeated attempts by the prison management to persuade him that such practices were unnecessary¹²⁵⁸.

¹²⁵⁴ "M'Clanahan Orders Stripes for All Louisiana Convicts", *The Shreveport Journal*, June 3, 1929.

¹²⁵⁵ "Hell on Angola", by William Sadler, *The New Orleans Item*, July 13, 1943.

¹²⁵⁶ "Blood Took Penitentiary 'Out of Red,' Records Show", *The Times-Picayune*, May 11, 1941.

¹²⁵⁷ April 1970, letter to Fay (Stender), in: Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 24.

¹²⁵⁸ "Hell on Angola", *The New Orleans Item*, July 20, 1943.

In 1940, following political changes in the Louisiana governorship, the prison management changed, and the new administration seemed inclined to end corporal punishment. In May 1940, Governor Sam Jones appointed a warden who had “experience working with criminals,” rather than farm management experience like most of his predecessors. D.D. Bazer was a former civilian guard at Oklahoma State penitentiary and the former chief of police in Shreveport¹²⁵⁹. Warden Bazer announced a change from the “old system” that had been supported by the Long political machine - Governor Huey Long then Governors Oscar K. Allen, Richard W. Leche (who would himself be convicted of corruption and imprisoned) and later Earl Long. He declared to the press that better conditions and the end of corporal punishment were on his agenda: “When I came here the prisoners cowered in fear of whippings. Now they’re changed and glad to do a day’s work”¹²⁶⁰. The prison newspaper, *The Argus*, celebrated this change with an illustration where appears a grave stone with the following inscription: “HERE LIES INHUMANE PUNISHMENT, Born: Back in the Dark Ages, Died: May 15, 1940 under the administration of Gov. Sam Jones”¹²⁶¹.

In pursuit of his new policy, Bazer “fired men of that older gang” because of the brutality they employed against prisoners. He dismissed thirty-one staff members all at once, i.e. about forty percent of the seventy-member penitentiary work force. Some of them had been employed for over twenty years at LSP¹²⁶². The “state payroll purge” created a disruption in the penitentiary operations when the dismissed employees left from one day to the next, laying “down their guns on the spot”, without giving time to the administration to manage the transition. The disruption was handled by a complete three-day lock-up of two white male camps before the prisoners were returned to the fields to labor¹²⁶³. “Warden Bazer was forced to keep the red-cap gang (deemed

¹²⁵⁹ Report of the Department of Institutions of the State of Louisiana for the Year October 1940-1941, Call number 976.3 (360.61) L888r, LARC.

¹²⁶⁰ “Prisoners at Angola Feast on Turkey at Real Thanksgiving”, *Morning Advocate*, November 29, 1940.

¹²⁶¹ *Angola Argus*, Volume 1, no. 5, December 25, 1940, Call number HV8301.A54, LARC.

¹²⁶² “Jones to Announce Job Policy”, *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1940. Staff hiring and firing was often directly linked with who had won the elections. In 1951, former prisoners talked to the press about some of the captains and foremen employed for a long time by the penitentiary, even some who were fired and re-hired. “Former Inmate Describes La. Prison as Devil’s Island, *The Plain Dealer*, April 20, 1951.

¹²⁶³ “Crisis at Pen Farm is Caused by Discharges”, *State Times Advocate*, July 30, 1940.

incorrigibles) and the gunmen (men who worked under the gun) under confinement while he hired replacements”¹²⁶⁴.

Despite his good intentions in renewing Angola staff and changing the culture, Bazer stated that he “had to hold onto a few of these old heads to help me carry on”. He also ordered whipping for what he called: “extreme cases that should be attended to that way on the outside”. These extreme cases were in reality Black male trustees being accused of bodily contact with white women, the housewives of the penitentiary employees. He concluded that: “Us Southern men here believe that that is the only way to handle them. Where a n... would be a servant in a house and put his hands on the free lady of the house, you just can’t get around it”¹²⁶⁵.

To what extent corporal punishment disappeared with the new administration is difficult to assess, however, the prisoners appreciated the changes brought by General manager Henry W. Frith and Warden Bazer. Prisoners were also aware of the political influence of the governorship on what was going on in State institutions like the penitentiary. *The Argus* reported at length how the white prisoners had collected money to make a Christmas gift to their new warden in December 1940, and how the Black prisoners, men and women, on learning about this, decided to also collect money to do the same. The warden was presented with a watch and a gold chain and a silver tray¹²⁶⁶.

Nonetheless, getting rid of the culture of brutality was not an easy task. Four years later, allegations of brutality were still in the press, and Governor Jimmie Davis threatened another “clean-out”. One guard who had resorted to flogging prisoners and was dismissed defended himself in a civil service hearing. The discharged guard admitted “that he had kicked the prisoner but the others did it too”. The Department of Institutions used trustees as witnesses, and they alleged that they had seen no flogging at the penitentiary in recent years. This gave these prisoners the opportunity to prove their allegiance to the institution in return for the privileges

¹²⁶⁴ Mouledous, “Sociological Perspectives on a Prison Social System”, 78.

¹²⁶⁵ 1944 Hearings, 214-215.

¹²⁶⁶ *Angola Argus*, Volume 1, no. 5, December 25, 1940, Call number HV8301.A54, LARC.

they had¹²⁶⁷. It also demonstrates the difficulty the authorities experienced in securing other employees' support for the "no-flogging" policy and testifying against one of them¹²⁶⁸. In December 1944, an executive order signed by the Governor forbade "floggings or other mistreatment of prisoners" and promoted treatment "as liberal and humane as possible consonant with proper discipline and observance of the law"¹²⁶⁹. The positions of general manager (held by W.T. Mitchiner since 1942) and warden were abolished, and to eliminate uncertainty over who was really in charge of the institution, they were replaced by the positions of superintendent and assistant superintendent. W.T. Mitchiner and D.D. Bazer stayed¹²⁷⁰.

According to the Catholic chaplain Father Marionneaux in 1944: "there hasn't been any [cruelty] since I have been here worth talking about it. That was stopped just before I came here. I am here about two and a half years. The executive order came out that all flogging must be stopped". He admitted however to "have witnessed two things":

One of them was a Captain who hit a white girl. The other one, I didn't see it happen but I saw the girl's condition after it happened. She may have been in the wrong, but I don't think the man had the right to hit her. That happened only recently, and I reported it to the Warden, and I understand that he has been removed. Her name was Myrtle W.... He was a yard man, a fellow by the name of Mr. Thames. I was given to understand that he was going to be moved¹²⁷¹.

Myrtle W., the Black woman who was hit by Thames, was described as "very belligerent" by Superintendent Mitchiner. Thames claimed that "he slapped her and thought she was going to stop but she grabbed him and he had to knock her loose. He hit her when she grabbed him". Nobody commented that it was unlikely that the 107-pound woman had any chance in this confrontation¹²⁷². Mitchiner recommended to Thames "who trashed two or three of them" that he

¹²⁶⁷ McWhorter, "The Trusty", 111.

¹²⁶⁸ "Davis Stresses Ban on Floggings", *The Times-Picayune*, October 25, 1944.

¹²⁶⁹ Executive Order no. 9, 1 December 1944, Collection P1986-011, Executive Orders – Commissions: Secretary of State, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹²⁷⁰ "State Penitentiary Heads Receive Re-appointments Under New Titles", *State Times Advocate*, December 14, 1944.

¹²⁷¹ 1944 Hearings, 132-133. In 1953, Kiley Thames was still employed by LSP. He was acting captain at St Gabriel, when two prisoners who wrote to the press accused him of beatings. Source: "Angola Camp Captain Transferred Following Prisoner Complaints", *The Crowley Post Signal*, July 28, 1953.

¹²⁷² Entry #26257, Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936, LSP Collection.

rather use solitary confinement as a punishment against women¹²⁷³. Father Marionneaux also admitted being aware that some camp captains forced prisoners to ingest Epsom salts, which provoked nausea, headache, light-headedness, and flushed skin, and in extreme cases, could lead to heart problems, coma, paralysis, or death. Interviewed by the investigation committee, the chaplain stated that this was an “unsanitary as well as inhuman” practice¹²⁷⁴.

Later that same year, the press questioned one of the incarcerated women. For the first time since the creation of the penal farm, the captain assigned to Camp D was a woman herself, Mrs. Wiley. The female prisoner (who was probably white) stated:

the past year has seemed like paradise compared to the old days. Sure, we live in a dirty wooden building, while the men have brick and concrete quarters, but under our present bosses, it's not so bad. We've got a lady superintendent now; and she's swell. She seems to know what we're thinking, and how to make it pleasanter for everyone concerned. All of us have to do the jobs assigned to us and there's no coddling or special privileges given any of us, but conditions certainly have changed since they removed our man boss.

The female prisoner also told the journalist that: “the women were subjected to many indignities by the camp superintendent, who at times made improper advances”. Finally she revealed that “with several other women, [she] led a ‘revolt’ that culminated in an attempt to burn down one of the buildings”. The man who had previously been in charge of Camp D for several years finally met resistance from the captives who did not agree to his sexual advances¹²⁷⁵.

In 1951, the illiterate and one-legged Charles McCrory, who had been at the prison for forty-two years, was placed in charge of the women's camp¹²⁷⁶. He replaced Tom H. Taylor, who was fired after an investigation committee had revealed his mistreatment of women at Camp D¹²⁷⁷. Several Black women prisoners described “how they were whipped with a leather belt by a white male supervisor for infractions of rules. One was a 17-year-old girl”¹²⁷⁸. According to a study

¹²⁷³ 1944 Hearings, 239.

¹²⁷⁴ 1944 Hearings, 21.

¹²⁷⁵ “State Penitentiary Put on Paying Basis in Two Years”, *Monroe Morning World*, December 3, 1944.

¹²⁷⁶ “Prison Farm Open to Press But Warden Bans Interviews With Prisoners and Tour of Hospital”, *States Times Advocate*, June 14, 1951.

¹²⁷⁷ “Angola Warden Bars Reporters”, *The Shreveport Journal*, June 2, 1951.

¹²⁷⁸ “Women at Pen ‘Disturbing’”, *The Times-Picayune*, March 13, 1951.

conducted in the early 1960s, “Evidence indicates that lashing and flogging continued, however unofficially, as the popular form of punishment and disciplinary measure until well into 1951”. Prison staff simply omitted to record the administered punishment in the prisoner’s file. A male prisoner participating in the study also mentioned another form of punishment: “they held our noses after we was ‘cuffed-up’ on the cross and poured a big glass of castor oil down our throats”¹²⁷⁹. Corporal punishments were used against Black women at least until the 1950s.

When solitary confinement was introduced at Camp D, white women were the first ones to be punished by this method, whereas Black women still received whippings. For instance, on April 27, 1925, Captain C. Lee Kleinpeter placed Josephine C. for forty-eight hours in confinement for “lying and disobedience”¹²⁸⁰. Penitentiary officials did not consider whipping as an appropriate form of punishment when women were white. By applying a racial hierarchy between Black and white female prisoners through prison discipline, LSP was instrumental in defining race rather than simply managing it. While Captain Willis was still using liberally the lash on Black female captives, he punished white women in other ways. On September 26, 1936, four white women (out of the seven who were in the white section of Camp D at the time) were “locked in solitary confinement [for] 72 hours [for] insubordination [and] threats to [the matron] Mrs. Willis and destroying clothing material in [the] tailor shop”. This incident, taking place at the tailor shop where white women were working under the matron’s supervision, is one of the rare occurrences of women’s collective rebellion in the historical record. Five months later, two of the same women were again reprimanded. This time, they only received a “blackmark” in their record “for smuggling incensored [sic] mail to men prisoners, for smuggling civilian clothes out of camp D for unknown purposes, for enticing women prisoners to mail U.S. letters uncensored, apparently for purpose of inciting a break”, and their “mail privileges [were] revoked for a period of six months” by Captain Willis, depriving them of communication with the outside world¹²⁸¹. Again, white women were given differential treatment for similar disciplinary incidents.

¹²⁷⁹ LeBlanc, “Selected Limitations on the Organization of Treatment in a ‘Modern’ Prison”, 33.

¹²⁸⁰ Entry #14827, Volume 25, no. 14603-15500, 1923-1925, LSP Collection.

¹²⁸¹ Entry #25214, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935; Entries #25442, #25834, Volume 41, no. 25301-25950, 1935; Entry #26495, Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936, LSP Collection.

The use of solitary confinement was an innovation of sorts. Camp A for Black men and Camp E for “incorrigible” white men had already had isolation units since the early 1930s. In the early 1940s, warden Bazer “had solitary cells built in some camps that were not yet equipped”. At Camp B, the new concrete structure without proper ventilation (a foot-square grille cut out of the steel door) proved to be suffocating, especially in summer months, and the penitentiary authorities had to stop using these cells¹²⁸². Several prisoners had passed out in the “sweat boxes”, in which they were placed in solitary confinement¹²⁸³. However, when, sent by the War Production Board, penologist Lewis Lawes visited Angola in December 1943, he found: “One prisoner who has been in the Segregation Building for four years [and who] claims innocence and while I have heard that one before I think he could safely put to work”¹²⁸⁴. The replacement of whippings by solitary confinement did not achieve consensus at Angola, including among those directly concerned. Indeed, well aware of the physical, emotional and mental effects of solitary confinement, prisoners dreaded the segregation cellblock¹²⁸⁵. Penitentiary authorities were also well aware of the effects of isolation. Beginning in the 19th century, there was ample evidence of the damage that solitary confinement caused to the incarcerated. For instance, prisoners in solitary confinement at the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia were described in newspaper reports as begging “that they may be hanged out of their misery”¹²⁸⁶. The prevalence of sickness and insanity among prisoners placed in solitary confinement was also observed at Auburn prison,

¹²⁸² Report of the Advisory Committee to the Department of Institutions, 27 April 1944, Call number HV98.L8 L68, LLMVC. See pages 21-22.

¹²⁸³ 1944 Hearings, 75-76, 217-219.

¹²⁸⁴ Lewis E. Lawes to W.K. Mitchiner, 16 December 1943, Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.1, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

¹²⁸⁵ “Convicts Prefer the Whip Over Solitary Cells”, *The Times-Picayune*, August 17, 1941. “Scientists from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, working independently and across several continents, and over many decades, have reached almost identical conclusions about the negative effects of isolation in general and solitary confinement in particular. [...] The American Psychological Association, the world’s largest professional association of psychologists, asserted [in a 2016 publication] that ‘solitary confinement is associated with severe harm to physical and mental health among both youth and adults, including: increased risk of self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation; greater anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, paranoia, and aggression; exacerbation of the onset of pre-existing mental illness and trauma symptoms; [and] increased risk of cardiovascular problems’”. Haney, “The Psychological Effects of Solitary Confinement: A Systematic Critique”, 367–68; A recent historical study demonstrates the long-term effects of solitary confinement, for instance on life expectancy and child birth. Inwood and Maxwell-Stewart, “Solitary Confinement and Health and Other Life Course Outcomes for Convict Women.”

¹²⁸⁶ Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776-1865*. Quoted in: Haney, “The Psychological Effects of Solitary Confinement: A Systematic Critique”, 370.

New York in the early 1920s¹²⁸⁷. Shortly after the Red-Hat cells were installed at Camp E, and their equivalents at Camp A, LSP authorities acknowledged that solitary confinement “affects the body on the deep inside, and you can’t see or know what damage you are doing”¹²⁸⁸.

It seems that corporal punishment to “discipline” the incarcerated was replaced by solitary confinement during the period of “modernization” that LSP underwent in the early 1950s, under the influence of the federal penologists who went to work in Louisiana. At that time, isolation became the response to individual as well as collective infringements of prison rules. In August 1952, nine alleged “ringleaders” were placed in “solitary on bread and water” after ninety-six Black men at Camp A had refused to go to work in the fields¹²⁸⁹. *The Angolite* commented enthusiastically on the disappearance of “leather” (i.e. the whip) from sugar cane fields during harvest. It also reported that: “Two convict guards [...] were confined to correctional cells on a restricted diet following what is said to have been a shotgun and knife fracas” and that “John Burpo, [was] currently in the ‘hole’ on a cabbage-and-potato diet [...] for Kickapoo joy juice” (i.e. homemade alcohol)¹²⁹⁰. LSP used and abused the policy of isolation. For instance, in the years 1952-1957, one male prisoner was placed fifteen times in isolation for “indefinite” periods of time over a five-year period for offenses such as “faking illness”, “destroying state property”, “attempt escape”, “insolence”, and “taking food for mess hall”¹²⁹¹. In 1961, the Louisiana Supreme Court heard the case of two white male prisoners who had spent over twelve months in solitary confinement after the Prison Disciplinary Board had found them guilty of attempt to introduce nasal inhalators on the grounds of LSP¹²⁹².

Unfortunately, existing sources do not reveal the extent of solitary confinement at the women’s camp. Only three “conduct reports” were found mentioning this punishment for a Black woman.

¹²⁸⁷ Barnes, “The Historical Origin of the Prison System in America”. Quoted in: Haney, 370–71.

¹²⁸⁸ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 9.

¹²⁸⁹ “9 at Angola Confined in Solitary”, *The Shreveport Journal*, August 11, 1952.

¹²⁹⁰ *The Angolite*, volume 1, no. 30, October 17, 1953.

¹²⁹¹ Conduct Report prisoner #41617, 28 January 1958, Box 23, Collection P1980-416, Attorney General Papers 1956-1960, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹²⁹² State v. Turner, 241 La. 94, 127 So. 2d 512, 1961 La. LEXIS 546 (Supreme Court of Louisiana February 15, 1961).

In March 1950, Mary H. (whom white women who appreciated her “marvelous job in the kitchen” would later call “our Mamma”) was placed ten days in isolation for “practicing Voodoo and Black Magic for a price” (see chapter 6)¹²⁹³. In December 1956, Gladys G., was placed twice on “isolation on a restricted diet for an indefinite period” within a two-week interval. The first time, she was found drunk. The second time, notes addressed to her by another prisoner (probably a man) were found on a prison bus¹²⁹⁴. In 1957, Inez W., another Black prisoner, was punished twice for “waving” to a male prisoner: the first time, she lost sixty days of good time; the second, she was placed on isolation for an “indefinite” period (see chapter 5)¹²⁹⁵.

These incidents were probably a fraction of the time Black women had to endure in the “sweatbox” or the “hole” at Camp D, after these “modernized punishments” were introduced more commonly at Angola to replace the whip. Indefinite solitary confinement and other forms of legally sanctioned torture (the straitjacket for example) quickly became the norm at Angola¹²⁹⁶. In 1960, a government report stated that the use of isolation at the new (male) prison at Angola was so widespread that over half of the space at the new hospital was in fact taken by “closed cell restricted” (CCR), a new term masking the brutality of solitary confinement behind the administrative lingo¹²⁹⁷. Some of Angola former prisoners hold the record of the longest period in isolation in the country¹²⁹⁸. Today in the U.S., dozens of thousands of individuals behind bars are subjected every year to this form of torture¹²⁹⁹.

¹²⁹³ *The Angolite*, November 12, 1955; Conduct report, 8 August 1958, Box 7, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹²⁹⁴ Conduct report, 16 January 1959, Box 8, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹²⁹⁵ Conduct report, 21 November 1960, Box 21, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹²⁹⁶ Childs, *Slaves of the State*, 101.

¹²⁹⁷ Board of Institutions, Subcommittee on Penal Institutions, Records & Transcription, 3 October 1960, Folder #34, Collection P1981-497, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives. See page 93.

¹²⁹⁸ Known as the Angola 3, Robert King, Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace spent a combined total of 114 years in solitary confinement at Angola where their affiliation to the Black Panther Party and its principles were perceived as disruptive of the carceral regime. See their accounts in: King, *From the Bottom of the Heap*; Woodfox, *Solitary*.

¹²⁹⁹ For more information, see: <https://solitarywatch.org/> Accessed August 19, 2022.

8.4 Body & Resistance

Altogether, the disciplinary incidents found in the archives reveal the contours of the resistance strategies employed by incarcerated women. The “misbehavior” category is particularly interesting: women used “obscene language”, talked disrespectfully, cursed, and articulated threats. By doing so, they verbally and explicitly protested against their captors and against prison rules. Those defiant acts were rare in a context where retaliation was both violent and predictable. More often than not, incarcerated women complied with prison rules and showed deference to their captors in order to avoid more victimization. In doing so, they appeared to submit to the racial and gendered hierarchies prevailing in the carceral settings. After all, Black women were experienced in hiding their true feelings under Jim Crow codes of conduct. At Angola, not unlike in the outside world, apparent obedience was the most realistic choice and the best survival strategy¹³⁰⁰.

Women also resorted to more indirect ways of protest, often involving their bodies in the process. Their bodies, vulnerable to state-sanctioned repeated attacks, also became tools of their resistance¹³⁰¹. They stole food or other items. They tore their prison clothes¹³⁰². They sabotaged working tools as well as the products of their coerced labor. Each of these acts might have had only a limited impact on the carceral system. However, taken together, they undermined prisoners’ labor productivity and the institution’s profits. They also might have served to test the limits of authority over them and find the weaknesses of their captors¹³⁰³.

To fully grasp the nature of resistance in prison, historians Bosworth and Carrabine challenge the idea that, to be worthy of the name, resistance has to be successful in evading relations of

¹³⁰⁰ Scott, *La Domination et les arts de la résistance*, 47, 81.

¹³⁰¹ Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay, *Vulnerability in Resistance*, 12, 22.

¹³⁰² Several historians found evidence of women refusing to wear prison uniforms. See for instance: Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*, 126.

¹³⁰³ Scott, *La Domination et les arts de la résistance*, 28, 208–9.

domination. Rather than being characterized by fixed relations of domination and subordination, “prison life is characterized by ongoing negotiations of power” conducted by prisoners who are actively engaged “in interpreting the legitimacy of their punishment, their peers and their opportunities”. Resistance, Bosworth and Carrabine argue, may occur from a weak position, since prisoners are relatively powerless in institutions that aim to control each of their activities and attitudes. Because “imprisonment is experienced as an external, brutal, social fact for all the incarcerated, when life is bearable through making do”, some prisoners may feel unable to challenge authority or may be incapable of doing so, for instance because of the threat of violent retaliation¹³⁰⁴. Indeed, insubordination to prison rules brought substantial physical and emotional costs for those among Angola’s women who chose deliberately to challenge authority. Consequently, surviving incarceration could mean purposefully and intentionally complying silently with the rules and submitting to their captors¹³⁰⁵. Black women’s agency was exercised alternatively by complying and by resisting to the prison regime.

Rule violations at Camp D were mostly individual actions, although some were conducted by pairs or more rarely in groups. The limited number of women incarcerated at Camp D at any time during their six-decade long presence at Angola might explain why organized collective resistance did not occur as often as it did in Angola male camps. The circulation of information within the penitentiary-plantation “through the grapevine” probably operated with a delay. This rendered any coordination between camps nearly impossible, not to mention the racial segregation that could in itself be a barrier to interracial collaboration in actions challenging conditions of incarceration¹³⁰⁶.

The incarcerated had to conceal their feelings and produce whatever words and actions their captors expected from them. It is easy to imagine that, at Angola like in other systems of domination, individuals also had to repress natural impulses of rage that would lead them to react

¹³⁰⁴ Bosworth and Carrabine, “Reassessing Resistance”, 501–2, 506.

¹³⁰⁵ Rubin, “The Consequences of Prisoners’ Micro-Resistance”, 3, 16.

¹³⁰⁶ However, historian Alex Tepperman argues that: “race and ethnic conflicts did not present a monolithic millstone that weighted prisoners’ every action and consideration. Inmates of different backgrounds could trade together, play together, and rebel together because they were rational actors and had more to gain through co-conspiracy than through strict self-segregation”. Tepperman, “Strange Bedfellows”, 20.

to insults, beatings and other forms of disregard for their persons and bodies. Controlling that rage was more often than not the way to survive, whereas affirming their dignity and humanity (and womanhood) could lead to more suffering or even to death¹³⁰⁷.

Sometimes women's rage was expressed through fights against other incarcerated women. Tensions could erupt among prisoners who were forced to live in antiquated, cramped and uncomfortable quarters and to work together in the worst conditions. Women could then resort to violence to defend themselves when they needed to¹³⁰⁸. Fighting with each other could also be interpreted as a form of individual autonomy. Indeed, starting a fight disrupted the prison routine, and for a brief moment, created a breach in the rigid (and boring) prison time regime¹³⁰⁹. It literally creates an event able to attract other prisoners' attention, as Helen Bryan suggests in her account of her confinement at Alderson reformatory:

Great, too, was the interest we took in hearing of fights between two girls or between a girl and an officer. We identified with the girls involved and wanted to know each detail of how it happened, what was said and done that brought on the fight and how it was stopped¹³¹⁰.

Fighting was by far the most common recorded infringement of prison rules (see table 8.8 above). Between May 1908 and February 1913, disciplinary measures were imposed 54 times on Black women for fighting, and only once against a white woman. All the Black women were whipped while the white one, Georgia W., was "shut up in [the] potato bunk for two days and fed on bread and water [for] drawing [a] stick and [uttering] threats" against another white prisoner, Bettie W. As dreadful as spending two days in a potato bin might have been for Georgia W., it is also obvious that her whiteness was the reason the Captain Austin spared her the lash. Moreover, the makeshift nature of the solitary cell he used to punish her also suggests that there was no provision in the penitentiary for such disciplinary measures to be employed against white women, possibly because of their very small number. Georgia W. was indeed only the thirteenth white woman to be admitted to LSP after the opening of the Angola penal farm. At the time of her fight

¹³⁰⁷ Scott, *La Domination et les arts de la résistance*, 50–51.

¹³⁰⁸ Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World*, 129.

¹³⁰⁹ Ricordeau, "« Faire son temps » et « attendre »", 63.

¹³¹⁰ Bryan, *Inside*, 250.

with Bettie W., only six white women were state prisoners¹³¹¹. Captain Austin intervened far more often in the Black female section of Camp D, and so did his successors, Captain Gayle and Captain Harvey. Between May 1908 and February 1913, they administered “whippings” to women who fought each other or attacked their dormitory mates. Black women would generally be subjected to between five to fifteen lashes at each occurrence, and more often than not, two women were punished at the same time, regardless of who had started the fight. Sometimes, the captain would punished differently the person who started the fight, as seems to have been the case on June 14, 1908, when Captain Austin struck Laura W. five times and Amelia T. ten times¹³¹².

The women’s age did not seem to stop the captains from striking them, nor did it influence the number of lashes they received for fighting. On March 17, 1909, Captain Austin administered fifteen lashes to Fannie B., who was only 14 or 15 years old at the time and was about to complete her six-month sentence, as well as her opponent in the fight, Martha M.¹³¹³. Austin also punished Janie C., a 16 year-old admitted in January 1909, with fifteen lashes for “attempting to fight” on April 12, 1909, only two weeks after he had struck her with thirty-five lashes for cursing¹³¹⁴. Captain Gayle (who took over Camp D in September 1909) recorded ten lashes or a “whipping” in each of his interventions for fighting. Some young women were involved in these painful moments, such as Sarah Jane B., a 15 year-old, on September 7, 1909, Clara B., a 17 year-old, on October 7, 1909 for fighting against Carrie Mary W., and Sidonia D., a 16 year-old, for “hitting a woman on [her] head with a stick” on May 18, 1910 only a month after her arrival at LSP. Sidonia D. was punished twice subsequently, including once on December 14, 1911 for “cutting [a] woman with [a] cane knife”, which suggests that the fight happened in the sugar cane field during harvest, thereby creating a labor disturbance. This might have been the

¹³¹¹ Entry #3073, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entry #4179, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection.

¹³¹² Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection. Pages 411, 485.

¹³¹³ Entries #4532 & #4707, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911; Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection. Pages 477-478.

¹³¹⁴ Entry #4722, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection; Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection. Page 478.

administration's justification for the fact that her release was postponed as she was "fined four months of good time"¹³¹⁵.

During this same period between May 1908 and February 1913, Rose W. was punished seven times for fighting, three times by Captain Gayle and four times by his successor, Captain Harvey. Three of these incidents opposed Rose W. to her rival Susie L., the latter being also involved in an incident during which she was caught "striking another prisoner with [an] iron rod"¹³¹⁶. Millie D. appeared three times in the records for fighting, including on June 13, 1911 for "attempting to stab [a] woman with [a] fork", presumably during a meal in the women's dining room¹³¹⁷.

Violence between women was still recorded during the 1920s and 1930s, as well as retaliation from the penitentiary authorities for the infraction of fighting. One incident of fighting was recorded between a pair of white women, Pearl B. and Leone M., who were "severely reprimanded" by Captain Kleinpeter on February 6, 1927¹³¹⁸. The same Captain Kleinpeter did not hesitate to record his use of the whip against Black women¹³¹⁹. Kleinpeter generally administered six, eight, ten or twelve lashes, which suggests that he devised his own system to determine the gravity of the punishment he would inflict (or, at least, the punishment that he would write down in the record). Kleinpeter's successor, Captain Willis, who was infamous for his violence, administered generally ten, fifteen or twenty-five lashes to women who had fought one another. Sometimes he would punish more one opponent than the other, for instance when

¹³¹⁵ Entries #4400, #4794, #4921, #5646, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection; Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection. Pages 530, 423, 503, 584.

¹³¹⁶ Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection. Pages 534, 401, 577, 584.

¹³¹⁷ Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, LSP Collection. Page 644.

¹³¹⁸ Entries #16244 & #16534, Volume 27, no. 16151-16824, 1925-1926, LSP Collection.

¹³¹⁹ Mamie B. was the only woman who had been involved in three fights recorded by Captain Kleinpeter, including once on July 18, 1925 along with two other women, Virginia L. and Mary L. On May 6, 1927 Captain Kleinpeter stroke Elizabeth W. and Beverly H. for "quarrelling and [use of] obscene language"; Elizabeth, the "aggressor", received fifteen lashes while the other woman received six. On August 13, 1927, Addie M. and Penella B. received respectively fifteen and ten lashes for "fighting with [a] dangerous weapon. Kleinpeter justified the difference by labelling Addie the "aggressor". Curiously, a few months later, on February 7, 1928, Mercedes D. and Evelina B. each received six lashes for fighting, although the Captain made it clear on Mercedes' record that she was the "aggressor". Kleinpeter inflicted again his maximum fifteen-lash strike on March 19, 1929 to Josephine D. for "fighting, biting and striking with [a] dangerous weapon". Entry #10501, Volume 24, no. 1823-14594, 1902-1923; Entry #15070, Volume 25, no. 14603-15500, 1923-1925; Entries #15585, #15676, #15885, Volume 26, no. 15501-16150, 1926; Entries #16491, #16697, Volume 27, no. 16151-16824, 1925-1926; Entry #17479, Volume 28, no. 16825-17500, 1926-1927; Entry #17591, Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928, LSP Collection.

Ophelia T. received twenty-five lashes and Virgie D. fifteen for fighting on July 8, 1931. But usually a pair of women would be punished equally, as was the case of Helen W. and Lillian F. who were each struck fifteen times on June 12, 1936, perhaps because the Captain did not bother to determine who started the fight. White female brawlers seem to have avoided Captain Willis' lash: he "removed [Mae B. from the] good time list for fighting with dangerous weapon" on May 18, 1934, but she was eventually granted parole the following year despite this bad mark on her record¹³²⁰. The disciplinary records suggest the absence of fights between Black and white women, which in turn provide evidence as to the segregated nature of the female camp at Angola.

As these disciplinary records also reveal, confrontations between women prisoners could be far more violent than "cat fights" with "hair pulling" and "name calling"¹³²¹. Women resorted to iron rods, cane knives, or other dangerous makeshift weapons, and their fights seem to be as violent as men's. In the absence of real weapons, they used whatever they had at their disposal that could hurt their opponent. For instance, in 1955, Annie P. was "accused of pouring scalding water on another inmate of the women's camp" and charges were brought against her in front of the West Feliciana Grand Jury. The results are unknown, but chances are that this breach to prison rules was judged in light of her previous aggressiveness. Indeed, she had served a 35-day jail sentence in Shreveport for assault ("weilding an ice pick as the climax of a brawl in a local bar") and had pled guilty of murdering her common law husband by stabbing him to death at a liquor store¹³²².

¹³²⁰ Entry #15475, Volume 25, no. 14603-15500, 1923-1925; Entry #17537, Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928; Entry #24092, Volume 39, no. 24001-24650, 1933-1934; Entry #24921, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935; Entry #26279, Volume 42, no. 25951-26699, 1935-1936, LSP Collection.

¹³²¹ Nonetheless, the male editor of *The Angolite* made fun of the violence erupting between women:

"Hair-pulling contest staged in CAT FIGHT AT 'D'. Grapevine reports from the Women's Camp Wednesday, indicated that two of the white buds and blossoms staged a 'cat fight' there Tuesday. The pair, engaging in what is alleged to have been an argument, switched to a hair-pulling contest complete with name-calling the information said. The fracas is said to have started over a woman who recently returned to the LSP with a brand-new nine-year hitch. Beyond needing services of a tonsorial artist, no damage was done to either contestant, the grapevine said. Participants of the bout were not identified. The 'humbug' is said to have provided considerable diversion and amusement to spectators. The Recreation Department denied yesterday that the duo has been approached with the offer of a spot in the ring for a possible Christmas Day fisticuff exhibition". *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 36, November 21, 1953.

¹³²² "Fines Totaling \$247.50 Leveled by Cuty Judge", *The Shreveport Journal*, January 18, 1954; "Charges Filed in Two Fatal Stabbings Here", *The Shreveport Journal*, April 29, 1954; "Life Sentence Given Negress on Murder Charge", *The Shreveport Journal*, June 22, 1954; "State Pen Escapees Face New Charges", *The Town Talk*, November 2, 1955.

In January 1956, *The Angolite* reported that Forbidden City resident Geneva J. “inflicted a knife wound on fellow resident Bernice S. that took 14 stitches to close. Ms J. indicated that she was tired of Ms. S.’s attempts to play ‘Jane-the-Grinder’ with her boyfriend”. How the two Black women could entertain any relationship with a man, presumably one of the LSP prisoners, was not explained. In April 1956, one “Forbidden City resident threw a Coke bottle at another woman, a tirade that was accompanied by ‘words you won’t find in the dictionary.’ She was fined 30 days of good time and placed in the ‘hole’”. The isolation cells at the Camp-D unit “consisted of two or three small locked rooms and stayed busy”. They were nicknamed ‘the women’s Red Hat’, in reference to maximum-security cells built in 1935 at Camp E after a riot in 1933 by white male prisoners referred to as the ‘Red Hat Gang’¹³²³. In 1955, *The Angolite* commented that Emma W. “almost made the ‘Red Hat’ scene today – and for waving at her OWN HUSBAND”¹³²⁴! Minor offenses could result in severe punishment.

The disciplinary records attest to the fact that physical violence was not a rare occurrence at Camp D, at least in the Black female section of the camp. Violence erupted between the women themselves, for reasons that the records do not reveal, but that were certainly exacerbated by the context of confinement and constant threat. More often than not, the camp captain himself imposed violent punishment, as a way to impose his authority and “restore order” in the camp. In addition to physical violence, women complained about the crudeness prison staff demonstrated to them on a daily basis. For instance, a woman interviewed by Charlotte Mae Richardson in 1959 talked about the patronizing attitude of one of the matrons: “she is constantly reminding you to be good – to do this and do that like you were an idiot”. Another complained about the partiality shown in the disciplinary reports. Another stated that prison staff treated female prisoners as to make them feel they were “underdogs”¹³²⁵. These remarks highlight the conditions

¹³²³ Fisher-Giorlando and Myers, “Bad Girls, Convict Women, Part 3: 1950 to a Home of Their Own”, 35; Bill Sinclair, former Angola prisoner, recalls “Angola’s torture chamber”: during the 1940s and 1950s “inmates sent to the Red Hat were brutally beaten by convict guards going in, beaten on a daily basis, and beaten coming out. They were fed bread and water twice a day. Some inmates were broken; others died from abuse and neglect. Some sent to the Red Hats during that era simply disappeared, never to be seen or heard from again”. Sinclair and Sinclair, *A Life in the Balance: The Billy Wayne Sinclair Story: A Journey from Murder to Redemption inside America’s Worst Prison System*, 51; The “Red Hat” cellblock was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2003. Source: Gardullo, “Angola Prison”.

¹³²⁴ *The Angolite*, December 10, 1955.

¹³²⁵ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 101, 123, 156.

that Kate Richards O'Hare, a socialist and anti-war activist, also observed at Missouri State Penitentiary during her incarceration as a political prisoner in 1919-1920: "One of my most horrible memories is that of the voices of our keepers. They never spoke to us as normal humans speak; they either snarled at us, cursed us, or screeched at us, and those snarling, rasping, hateful voices still haunt my dreams"¹³²⁶.

Violence was not the only dimension of women's interactions with each other. Solidarity was also present and at times, alliances could be forged. Even Marie T. and Rose W., who had allegedly fought against each other in November 1909, were ready to "bury the hatchet". Only three weeks later, they united with thirteen of their peers against the camp captain, their common oppressor¹³²⁷.

Friendship and surrogate kinship relations were also formed¹³²⁸. When she left Angola, Virgie Mae P., a Black prisoner, asked *The Angolite* to publish a good-bye note to the women she was incarcerated with: "I want to give the girls three cheers and a big thanks to them for being so kind to me"¹³²⁹. Goldie McD., a white woman, also spoke in positive terms of her mates:

We inmates here have long ago learned to take the bitter from the sweet, for most of us have known far more bitterness than sweet, however, most of the girls here are very humorous and full of fun. We read lots, in fact everything that we can get to read, which consists of magazines of all kinds that some good neighbor or friends sends in. We are like a bunch of kids or all sisters. We confide in each other, share our few joys, and all of our troubles with each other; have our daily Bible readings, and nightly prayers¹³³⁰.

These attest to the bonds that incarcerated women could develop within the female camp. Sometimes, relationships between Angola's women got intimate, which is what the next section explores.

¹³²⁶ Quoted in: Miller, "Reflections on the Chain Gang and Prison Narratives from the Southern United States", 261.

¹³²⁷ Entry #3457, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entry #3848, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection.

¹³²⁸ For a detailed discussion on women's relationships, see: Richardson, "Women in Prison"

¹³²⁹ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no 12, June 20, 1953.

¹³³⁰ "People's Column", *The Weekly News*, October 4, 1952.

8.5 Sexuality & Sexual Violence

Unfortunately, historical records only reveal a glimpse of the same-sex relationships that occurred at the women's camp. According to some scholars, sexual relations between consenting prisoners constitute "a strategy of negotiating power on a small scale":

Lesbian and homosexual relations in prison can be understood as strategies of resistance not only to the pains of imprisonment as traditional sociologists would have us believe, but also to stereotypical constructions of gender put forward by the institutions themselves¹³³¹.

Indeed, LSP authorities found lesbian relationships disruptive. Moreover, their racist views informed the ways in which they interpreted the bonds women created with each other. In 1944, Warden Bazer reported that Mrs. Wiley, Camp D captain, "said that quite a few of the negro women did practice it. It does not occur in the white so far as she is able to determine". Bazer added that other wardens he had met at prison conventions also complained about this concern¹³³². Historian Cheryl Hicks tackles the issue of same-sex sexuality in confinement in her study of women held at the Bedford female-only reformatory in New York. Hicks' chapter on the "harmful intimacy" between Black and white female inmates shows the racialized conceptions of sexuality in the early 20th century. Bedford's staff and administration considered white women having lesbian relationships as either mentally deficient or morally weak because of their lower social class. Conversely, Black women engaging in same sex practices at Bedford were viewed through the lens of anti-Black prejudices, i.e. as sexually uncontrolled. Therefore, their influence on white women was perceived as dangerous, and the most troublesome for the safety of the reformatory¹³³³. LSP Warden Bazer's remarks mentioned above clearly point to the fact that at Angola, Black women were considered more sexually active and more depraved than their white counterparts who were viewed through the lens of ideals of southern womanhood.

¹³³¹ Teresa Dirsuweit quoted in: Bosworth and Carrabine, "Reassessing Resistance", 511–12.

¹³³² 1944 Hearings, 222.

¹³³³ Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman*, chap. 7; Tarter and Bell, *Buried Lives : Incarcerated in Early America*.

Ironically, surviving LSP archival records only reveal white women who were punished for engaging in lesbian relationships. In December 1955, Betty T., a white woman convicted of marijuana possession, was found “in the washroom with another inmate”. Not even a month before, Alice, *The Angolite*’s female correspondent, had described Betty T. as a “luscious” woman “spending her leisure hours with a ‘cardboard typewriter’”. Most probably, Betty T. was learning to type. Since early November, she had been working in the mail room, but was perhaps preparing to be placed in one of the few clerk positions available even to white prisoners. Unfortunately, whatever happened in the prison bathroom led her to be transferred to the sewing room, placed in isolation, and deprived of ninety days of good time (which was restored nine months later), and it ruined her plans of winning a trusty labor assignment¹³³⁴. In 1959, Mary Gladys D. was punished for “kissing an inmate and sleeping in another inmate’s bed”. The alleged robber, who had a nervous condition and was deemed “in need of psychiatric and medical care,” was then placed in isolation and lost thirty days of good time¹³³⁵. Jean V., another white woman who was a convicted forger and burglar, was placed in isolation and lost sixty days of good time for “letting another inmate sleep in her bed”, presumably Mary Gladys D.¹³³⁶. By their sexual behavior, these white women had contested norms of white womanhood, and the carceral institution made them pay the price.

Richardson’s study conducted in the late 1950s at Angola revealed that some women were referred to as “boy-girls” by some of the prison personnel. In their views, this term meant a female inmate who assumed a masculine role in her relationship with another, in contrast with the use of the term “gal-boys” for some homosexuals in men’s camps¹³³⁷. However, Richardson did not touch on the centrality of same-sex relationships at Angola’s women’s camp. Rather, her

¹³³⁴ Conduct Report, 26 July 1960, Box 15, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge; *The Angolite*, November 5, 1955; November 19, 1955; December 17, 1955; December 31, 1955. A note that no offense related to same-sex relations were found in the disciplinary incidents (1908-1913, 1925-1935) mentioned in the LSP Collection.

¹³³⁵ Conduct Report, 18 January 1960, Box 13, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹³³⁶ Conduct Report, 6 June 1962, Box 20, Collection P1991-044, Pardon Working Papers 1956-1972, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹³³⁷ Richardson, “Women in Prison”, 75.

conclusions contest Kassebaum and Ward's classic work on women's prisons. In their research on women incarcerated in Frontera, California, these scholars argue that engaging or not in lesbian sexuality was the most salient distinction to be made between women¹³³⁸. For her part, Rose Giallombardo, who conducted a study at Alderson women's reformatory in the 1960s, found that homosexual relationships served to create alliances between women. More importantly, Giallombardo argues that, contrary to what prevails in a lot of what is written on male homosexual relationships in prison, lesbian relationships were established voluntarily¹³³⁹. Sociology studies conducted in contemporary women's prisons also demonstrate that homosexual relationships help incarcerated women deal with their loneliness, seclusion, and isolation from society¹³⁴⁰.

Although historical records remain mostly silent on sexual violence, Black women's vulnerability to male abuse appears clearly in these records. Placed in a male penitentiary, women were not protected from sexual assault or advances from male prisoners. LSP General manager Henry L. Fuqua acknowledged that it was difficult for his staff to ensure the segregation of men and women at Angola. Fuqua explained: "Despite every effort, constant care, and vigilance, the cunning power of sexual desire sometimes thwarted us"¹³⁴¹. Fuqua, like other LSP authorities, seemed to assume that heterosexual relationships between male and female prisoners were a natural consequence of their proximity. They also assumed that such relations were necessarily consensual (which may not have been the case). In short, despite the close surveillance prisoners were subjected to¹³⁴², heterosexual relationships between prisoners were deemed unavoidable.

¹³³⁸ Kassebaum and Ward, *Women's Prison*.

¹³³⁹ Giallombardo, *Society of Women*, 185–86.

¹³⁴⁰ See for instance: Califano, *Sexualité incarcérée. Rapport à soi et rapport à l'autre dans l'enfermement*; The proportion of women engaged in lesbian relationships in prison was estimated between 25% and 60%. Forsyth, Evans, and Foster, "An Analysis of Inmate Explanations for Lesbian Relationships in Prison", 2002 quoted in: Ricordeau, *Les détenus et leurs proches*, 152.

¹³⁴¹ "Manager Fuqua Replies to Prof. Heery's Criticisms", *The Times Picayune*, March 6, 1917.

¹³⁴² This surveillance most probably led to punishment for those caught in the act. Professor Heery, a penologist from Tasmania who visited Angola in 1917, recounted that not long before his arrival: "A trusty prisoner from an adjoining camp was shot dead as he was leaving the women's camp before sunrise". Source: "Prison System Declared Breeder of Far Worse Evils", *The Times Picayune*, February 26, 1917.

In 1940, when Estelle R. complained about what I interpret as an aggression, she was punished by the lash for “making false charges against 2 white men prisoners trying to get them into trouble”¹³⁴³ (see chapter 5). Not only her grievances against her assailants were ignored, she was also punished for seeking protection from her captors. In 1944, the “inmate clerk” “in the confines of the photograph room” victimized an unknown Black woman during her admission procedures¹³⁴⁴. It took almost ten years for the penitentiary authorities to bring in a female guard to accompany women during the admission procedures in order to ensure that this type of abuse could not reoccur (see chapter 4).

Penitentiary authorities also dismissed the stories of treatment that male staff inflicted on female prisoners, which could be seen as abusive in view of the imbalance of power characterizing the carceral regime. Women might have wished (or felt obliged to) alleviate some of the pains of their imprisonment by seducing male staff members or agreeing to their sexual advances in order to obtain privileges (or promises) such as better food rations, some freedom of movement, support for a clemency application, or even “good time”. At the same time, they were largely powerless to resist the intimidation exercised by their male captors, who could very well punish them by the lash for one reason or another. In any case, the fact that they engaged in these activities did not mean that they consented¹³⁴⁵. One of the staff members who met with an investigation committee in 1960 reported that:

I don't think you have any free personnel, men, free personnel problem at the women's camp at all. I mean in that respect. I think they had one guy over there the Warden fired him that night I think he tried to make a pass at one of those gals and about four of them jumped on him and give him a good beating, I believe he got out¹³⁴⁶.

This statement indicates that LSP had finally decided to remove male guards over female prisoners. According to one of the American Prison Association presidents, this problematic

¹³⁴³ Entry #24192, Volume 39, no. 24001-24650, 1933-1934, LSP Collection.

¹³⁴⁴ Proposal for a survey at Angola, undated (ca.1944?), Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.1, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

¹³⁴⁵ Nicole-Claude Mathieu, *L'anatomie politique*, 1991, quoted in: Chetcuti-Osorovitz, *Femmes en prison et violences de genre*, 149.

¹³⁴⁶ Transcripts, 3 October 1960, State Penitentiary Investigations, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Collection P1981-497, folder 34, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

organization at LSP, like in many other prisons, afforded “opportunity for the development of scandal”¹³⁴⁷. In other state penitentiaries, where female prisoners were placed under male guards’ control, sexual abuse and coercion by guards were frequent, although difficult to document. For instance, Mississippi State Senator Howard McDonnell of Biloxi, commenting on Parchman penal farm, declared in a 1966 interview: “I can well remember... when there were sex relations not only between inmates, but among inmates and officials”¹³⁴⁸. Jane Howe Gregory argues that in Texas in the 1900s, guards’ authority and prisoners’ submission resulted in a form of negotiation rather than rape:

Women prisoners seem to have been induced rather than forced to have sex, and to have used their sexuality to ease the conditions of their incarceration [...]. Most received money for sexual favors, from one to three dollars, and guards promised to help them get released early¹³⁴⁹.

Based on female prisoners’ testimonials in front of a 1910 investigating committee, Teresa Jach also argues that Black women incarcerated in Texas “chose sexual relationships with guards in hopes of bettering their position or avoiding punishment”. The few dollars they got from guards was needed for the commissary or to send home to their families. They were “easy prey for unscrupulous guards” who not only engaged in sexual relationships with their captives, but also pressured them into taking potions to prevent pregnancy¹³⁵⁰.

Indeed, prison authorities generally resented the potential source of embarrassing publicity brought about by a prisoner’s pregnancy¹³⁵¹. When, in 1917, General manager Fuqua had mentioned the sexuality of Angola prisoners, he also stated that: “every few years a black sheep was born in the women’s quarters”¹³⁵². Incidentally, some of these births are recorded in annual reports. The resident physician recorded one childbirth in 1906 and two in 1907, for which no

¹³⁴⁷ Dr. David C. Peyton (Indiana reformatory), quoted in: “‘Prisoners’ Parole to ‘Best Friend’ Leads to Peonage’”, *The Times-Picayune*, November 26, 1917.

¹³⁴⁸ “Parchman”, by Robert D. Boyd, *Mississippi Magazine*, Summer 1966, Series 5, Subject Files, Box 2179, Folder 2, Mississippi AFL-CIO Records 1947-1986, Special Collections, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

¹³⁴⁹ Gregory, “Persistence and Irony in the Incarceration of Women in the Texas Penitentiary, 1907-1910”, 80–81.

¹³⁵⁰ Jach, “‘It’s Hell in a Texas Pen’”, 256–60.

¹³⁵¹ Gregory, “Persistence and Irony in the Incarceration of Women in the Texas Penitentiary, 1907-1910”, 8.

¹³⁵² “Manager Fuqua Replies to Prof. Heery’s Criticisms”, *The Times Picayune*, March 6, 1917.

detail was provided¹³⁵³. No other mention of births while in custody was made in reports to the legislature, despite the fact that, according to historical records, several women were pregnant on their admission¹³⁵⁴. Fuqua's statement reveals that penitentiary authorities considered that the fact that a female prisoner gave birth in prison from time to time was the most negative possible outcome for the institution of heterosexual relationships between prisoners. More than four decades after Fuqua's statement, Warden Victor Walker also acknowledged that this was the "most embarrassing" case for the institution. He stated that: "two women inmates have become pregnant since 1954. One of these is a recent happening. In fact the prisoner is four months pregnant at this writing"¹³⁵⁵. One of these women was a 19-year-old Black woman serving a life sentence who "admitted intimacy" with a Black trusty who oversaw women's work at the laundry¹³⁵⁶.

What happened to babies born in custody of the LSP is unknown. LSP failed to participate in a national survey of "prison babies" that the John Howard Association conducted in the late 1940s. Among the sixty-five respondent institutions (training schools, reformatories, and state penitentiaries), thirty-one reported babies born to women in their custody during the year 1947. Although provisions differed from one institution to the other, babies generally remained with their mothers only for short periods of time after delivery. For the most part, whenever possible, they were placed with relatives. However, some institutions did not leave the choice to the mother before their infant was placed in an orphanage, or under control of the public welfare

¹³⁵³ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1906-1907, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Report of the physicians, pages 67-68.

¹³⁵⁴ Only four women were recorded as pregnant at the time of admission: a 22 year-old admitted in 1897 ("7 months pregnant"), a 15 year-old admitted in 1909 ("pregnant"), a 16 year-old admitted in 1921, and a 17 year-old admitted in 1923 ("says she is pregnant"). The small numbers might be the result of under-reporting from the penitentiary officials or from the women themselves. Entry #13279, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entry #4921, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911; Entries #13282 & #14370, Volume 19, no. 12856-15643, 1921-1925, LSP Collection. Note that Volume 10 listed prisoners admitted before 1901 who were still present on January 1, 1901 and who had a penitentiary number attributed in the previous regime.

¹³⁵⁵ Victor G. Walker, Angola Warden, to Chester Green, Chairman of the Board of Institution, 20 September 1960, Folder 1959-1960-1961, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Sam Anderson, Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹³⁵⁶ "19-Year-Old Inmate At Angola Pregnant", *The Crowley Post-Signal*, May 25, 1954.

agency, for instance in a foster home¹³⁵⁷. Only in rare instances do the historical records give any indication of Louisiana policy regarding births in custody (although this might have changed over the period)¹³⁵⁸. Angola nurse Mary Daugherty (who left her position in 1951) declared: “I even had to deliver babies. [...] Of course when an inmate’s baby was delivered, the family come got [sic] the baby”¹³⁵⁹. In March 1951, when the members of an investigation committee visited Camp D, they found a one-month baby, born to a Black mother who was serving a one-year sentence (presumably, she had been pregnant on admission). The journalist commented:

It was not known as to whether the mother and the child would remain together during the balance of the mother’s term, If the family of the mother can take care of the infant, they might be permitted to care for the child; if not, it will be turned over to the welfare department¹³⁶⁰.

Sexual abuse of Black female prisoners at Angola should not come as a surprise. Because of the racist sexualized views of Black women prevailing in society, their victimization might even have served to protect white female prisoners from the guards’ sexual attacks¹³⁶¹. During slavery and after Emancipation, rape of Black women by whites was used continuously as a means to impose white supremacy¹³⁶². However, there are important distinctions between the abuses occurring under these systems of oppression. During slavery, Black women had little control over their reproduction. Pregnancies resulting from sexual abuse were usually welcome by slaveholders, anxious to increase the value of their human property, even when the children had their own blood. Conversely, after Emancipation, Black women were denied the right to reproduce. During Jim Crow, pregnant Black women were lynched, and Black women were involuntarily sterilized in many custodial institutions. Historian Talitha LeFlouria also argues that pregnancy and childbirth were viewed as deterrents to economic growth in some southern prison

¹³⁵⁷ “A Study of Some Aspects of Care and Treatment of Pregnant Inmates and Their Infants in Training Schools, Reformatories and Prisons”, Preliminary Report, 21 July 1948, Box 14, Call number MSS Lot J, John Howard Association records 1898-1976, Chicago History Museum Research Center.

¹³⁵⁸ Nicole Hahn Rafter gives examples of institutional policies regarding babies and children of female prisoners. See: Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 167–69.

¹³⁵⁹ Quoted in: Hamilton and Henderson, *Louisiana State Penitentiary*, 26.

¹³⁶⁰ “Negro Women Prisoners Whipped At Angola; Find Baby In ‘Pen’”, *Louisiana Weekly*, March 17, 1951.

¹³⁶¹ Jach, ““It’s Hell in a Texas Pen””, 19.

¹³⁶² See for instance: Davis, *Women, Race & Class*; Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History*; Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom. Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*.

systems. LeFlouria finds evidence of the killings of Black mothers and their offspring in historical records concerning Georgia at the turn of the 20th century¹³⁶³. Altogether, these demonstrate that Black children were of no value to white society. The control over Black women's wombs was still a significant way to impose white supremacy, although in a very different way than during slavery, since pregnancy and childbirth were considered as problematic for incarcerated Black women's productivity. Black female bodies were most probably submitted to these abuses on the penitentiary-plantation, as they were subjected to medical neglect, which the next section explores.

8.6 Healthcare at Angola

"There was no such thing as being ill at Angola without a fever" stated a former white male prisoner in the early 1940s¹³⁶⁴. With this statement, Charlie "Piney Woods" described some of the medical neglect LSP prisoners suffered during their incarceration¹³⁶⁵. This medical neglect was an additional way to punish and degrade incarcerated individuals whose health certainly deteriorated because of harsh labor conditions and poor hygiene.

At Angola, before they could even see the prison doctor, prisoners who felt sick would have to convince their camp captain that they were not feigning to avoid coerced labor. Of course, the institution did not encourage doctors to take prisoners' complaints seriously. In the outside world,

¹³⁶³ LeFlouria, "Menacing (Re)Production: The Commodification and De-Commodification of Incarcerated Black Women's Wombs and Work."

¹³⁶⁴ "Torture Factory", by Jon Edgar Webb, 1941, Vertical Files, Hogan Archive of New Orleans Music and New Orleans Jazz, Tulane University Special Collections, New Orleans. From an interview with Charlie "Piney Woods" Hagan prisoner #13928 (Camp E).

¹³⁶⁵ Tragically, today incarcerated individuals are still commonly denied their right to healthcare in prisons in the U.S. and elsewhere. A recent U.S. study demonstrates that "state prisons fall far short of their constitutional duty to meet the essential health needs of people in their custody. As a result, people in state prison are kept in a constant state of illness and despair". "Chronic Punishment: The unmet health needs of people in state prisons", by Leah Wang, June 2022, Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/chronicpunishment.html> Accessed August 25, 2022.

a doctor would generally believe their patient's description of pain and other negative symptoms, whereas in prison, he would be encouraged to be suspicious of everybody claiming anything wrong, especially if it involved their ability to complete their daily work load. The primary function of prison physicians was not to ensure the health of their patients, but to contribute to penal discipline. Louis Grey Stirling, who was the first penitentiary physician hired at LSP in 1901 and who remained for twenty-nine years in charge of the penitentiary general hospital at the "Walls", stated in one of the officials reports: "Many prisoners, as soon as they reach the walls, begin practicing the symptoms of various forms of illness and feigning sickness constantly"¹³⁶⁶.

It was also prison doctors who decided whether a new prisoner was fit or not to work, based on their first examination at admission (although all of them had be sentenced to "hard labor", some were not physically capable to do so). Doctors were also the ones deciding, in the case of male prisoners, what the incoming prisoners' classification would be (1, 2 or 3), which in turn impacted their labor assignment. All female prisoners had the same classification (3), except the ones deemed unable to perform any work (4). Therefore, Camp D captain most probably determined women's assignment. Physicians employed by the penitentiary were necessarily placed in an ambivalent position. They were paid to care for prisoners; however, their more important assignment was to make sure they were fit enough to work. This situation was not unlike the antebellum physicians who worked for slaveholders rather than caring for the enslaved:

Owners made their complaints or treatment wishes known to physicians and gave or withheld consent for procedures, from sterilization to amputation to autopsy. The planter, not the slave, had to be satisfied with the results. [...] the slave [was] left outside, unconsulted, uninformed, and with no recourse if she or he was unsatisfied, injured, or killed – a medical nonentity¹³⁶⁷.

Prisoners were "medical nonentities", caught in a carceral system that attacked their bodily integrity on a daily basis. Prison physicians were hired to offer the minimum healthcare possible, and more importantly to give their professional assent to the carceral regime. That is precisely what LSP physician Dr. J.L. Pittman did in 1930, when former penitentiary chaplain Reverend

¹³⁶⁶ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1908-1909, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 115.

¹³⁶⁷ Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 46.

F.L. Cox attacked that system. Cox testified to a Senate Committee: “that on some occasions he had seen convicts whipped until their skin was broken ‘from their shoulders to their knees’”, and “that prisoners were frequently whipped for disobedience”. In response, Pittman “denied that brutal punishment was administered, and testified that since he had become connected with the prison only three prisoners had been whipped seriously enough to be placed in the hospital”. He also attacked the chaplain’s credibility by ridiculing him: “Mr. Cox thinks a prison can be run like a high school and that all the convicts, many of whom are hardened criminals, can be treated like school boys”, Pittman declared to a journalist. Warden J. E. McClanahan had fired Cox whom he accused of stirring “a rebellious spirit among the prisoners”. The former chaplain maintained that he was only telling the truth, and had evidence “to prove that prisoners have been incapacitated for work and have had to remain in the yard or hospital for days and sometimes weeks because of blows and kicks” that they had received. Cox even told that: “One captain made the remark to me not over two weeks ago that he whipped so-and-so until he vomited and that he would be whipping him yet had not one of his foreman interfered”¹³⁶⁸.

Like Angola physicians, doctors working in other prisons defended the brutality that was employed against the incarcerated. Dr. A.M. M’Callum, Parchman’s first physician, defended the lash by declaring: “There simply was no better way of punishing [this] class of criminals and keeping them at the labor required of them”¹³⁶⁹. In the 1920s, Dr. Robert McGregor, prison physician at Jackson Prison, Michigan, was even expected to assist actively the person who administered corporal punishment. In fact, the doctor “holds the pulse of the man being flogged and gives the signal for the flogger to stop”. Before they were hit, Jackson (male) prisoners were “blindfolded, handcuffed and shackled”. The flogger who administered punishment on a bare back with a “heavy strap about four inches in width” remained unseen by the prisoner. The doctor was there to make sure the punishment did not compromise the prisoner’s life¹³⁷⁰.

¹³⁶⁸ Pleasant, “Ruffin G. Pleasant and Huey P. Long on the Prisoner-Stripe Controversy”, 362; “Pen Broke Tile Sales Agreement”, *Morning Advocate*, June 26, 1930; “Ousted Chaplain Repeats Charges of Brutalities”, *The Times-Picayune*, January 1, 1930.

¹³⁶⁹ Quoted in: Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery*, 151.

¹³⁷⁰ “Brutal Floggings at Jackson Prison”, issued by the Political & Civic League of Detroit, undated (circa 1921?), Correspondence 1921-1948, Box 17, Folder 5, Call number MSS Lot J, John Howard Association records 1898-1976, Chicago History Museum Research Center.

In prisons, women were often suspected of feigning illness, especially on the pretext of their menstrual pain¹³⁷¹. In November 1917, the American Prison Association held its annual meeting in New Orleans. On this occasion, a conference of the prison physicians was organized. Dr. E.F. Green from St Cloud, Minnesota presented on the following subject: “The Influence Exerted by Mental Defect and Derangement on the Moral Character”. Green addressed particularly the question of the delinquency of girls and women. He stated that it was due largely to “laziness” and that a “good wholesome occupation [was] recommended as one of the preventive measures to be put into effect wherever and whenever possible”. In short, Green supported the idea that forced labor was a cure against women’s crime¹³⁷².

If gender influenced prison doctors in their perspectives on their patients, race was even more important as a factor. In the 1910s, LSP physician Dr. Lester J. Williams was in charge of three levee camps where labor was usually performed by Black male prisoners under horrible conditions. Nevertheless, Williams argued that Black men were better off toiling for the state building levees than they were before, when they were free:

Consider [...] that the negro criminal class (who alone build levees) as a rule is afflicted with all the ills the flesh is heir to, and reaches the Penitentiary very much below par. Also consider that before his incarceration the negro criminal was usually badly housed, improperly clothed and poorly nourished. With these primary conditions to combat, his physical condition while in camp is wonderful, and commends the splendid treatment the Board of Control gives to the convicts in their charge¹³⁷³.

Prison physicians also endorsed the racial hierarchies of the penitentiary. For instance, Angola physician Dr. William G. Smith suggested “a separation of races as early as possible” at Angola General Hospital. The same year, Dr. Louis G. Stirling was pleased that at the “Walls” in Baton Rouge “cells occupied by the prisoners have been enlarged and their ventilation made adequate during the last two years, and the white and negro patients in the Hospital have been segregated;

¹³⁷¹ Jach, ““It’s Hell in a Texas Pen””, 254.

¹³⁷² “Female Delinquents. Some of the Causes that Lead Women to Acquire ‘Records’”, *The Times-Picayune*, November 23, 1917.

¹³⁷³ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quote on page 118.

both of which steps have improved health conditions materially”¹³⁷⁴. Stirling’s remark that the racial segregation at the hospital helped improved prisoners’ health condition speaks of the doctor’s racial beliefs. Like many other whites, Stirling probably believed that whites would be contaminated if close to Black individuals who were deemed unhealthy by nature. In Texas in the 1900s, “Most of the black women complained they were forced to work [in the fields] even when they were ill” whereas white women “were taken at their word” and “got time off work if they said they were ill”¹³⁷⁵. There again, the racial factor influenced guards and prison physicians in their assessment of prisoners’ health conditions.

Occasionally, prison doctors served as a safeguard against the abuses of the carceral system. The historical record reveals that at least on one occasion, the prison physician disagreed with LSP authorities and verbalized his discontent. Former Angola prisoner William Sadler reported the following conversation he overheard between Warden Jones and a young physician, Dr. Dane (alias used by Sadler). After saving a prisoner who had been shot by buckshot, the young physician was criticized by the authorities for caring too much for his patients:

Warden: Whenever you have a case you think you ought to bring to the hospital, you call me up and ask for my permission. I’ll tell you whether I want the man in the hospital or not.

Dr. Dane: Am I to assume, Warden, that if a man is dying in the field, you want me to call you first?

Warden: That’s absolutely right!

Dr. Dane: Then Warden, I do not believe it is the place for any man to dictate to a physician his duty, rather than that I shall resign.

Warden: You can d— well quit right now and get off the farm¹³⁷⁶!

Penitentiary authorities encouraged prison physicians to endorse the institutional goals, which were centered around coerced labor and profit, rather than prisoners’ well-being and health. In her dissertation dedicated to healthcare and medicine in Minnesota State Prison, scholar Margaret Lynn Charleroy states that: “Training literature for prison physicians noted the importance of being able to distinguish between real and sham illness, but offered few, if any, guidelines for

¹³⁷⁴ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Quotes on pages 129, 133.

¹³⁷⁵ Jach, ““It’s Hell in a Texas Pen””, 254.

¹³⁷⁶ “Hell on Angola”, *The New Orleans Item*, July 15, 1943.

this assessment". Most often, the literature that prison physicians consulted was in journals in the fields of penology, criminal law and criminality, such as the *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*. Articles written by physicians in collaboration with penologists and legal specialists constituted most of this literature. At the turn of the 20th century, the National Society of Penal Information published detailed guidelines for prison physicians in the *Journal of Crime and Criminality*. These guidelines were to help physicians assess prisoners' health during a comprehensive examination including "general inspection, alimentary system, respiratory system, circulatory system, genitourinary system, cutaneous system, glandular system, nervous system, muscular, and deformities"¹³⁷⁷.

Prison physicians were required to perform a variety of medical procedures, with very little equipment available. Unfortunately, no medical records were found in the LSP archives. There are, nonetheless, a few mentions of medical operations performed on women. For instance, in the 1940s Beulah B. received a supravaginal hysterectomy while she was in her thirties¹³⁷⁸. Two official reports mentioned "abortion cases"¹³⁷⁹. Given the fragmentary nature of the historical record, it is difficult to say whether or not these cases were miscarriages, voluntary pregnancy interruptions or so-called "therapeutic abortions" performed by the medical staff. These procedures were performed in a national (and international) context where eugenics were gaining considerable ground. Forced sterilizations occurred on a large scale in state institutions, particularly the ones where women deemed "feeble-minded" were held in custody¹³⁸⁰. Prisons also contributed to this destructive enterprise, such as in Indiana where several hundred sterilizations were performed. Race was an important factor in this movement, and Black women were particularly targeted¹³⁸¹.

¹³⁷⁷ Charleroy, "Penitentiary Practice: Healthcare and Medicine in Minnesota State Prison, 1855-1930", 59, 76.

¹³⁷⁸ Entry #25953, Volume 41, no. 25301-25950, 1935, LSP Collection.

¹³⁷⁹ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans.

¹³⁸⁰ For example, North Carolina sterilized over 8,000 people between 1929 and 1975. The majority of victims were white women considered feeble-minded or "subnormal" who "failed to measure up to the standards of white purity". After 1958 most victims were African American. Zipf, *Bad Girls at Samarcand: Sexuality and Sterilization in a Southern Juvenile Reformatory*, 160-61.

¹³⁸¹ "Eugenics", by T.B. Fitcher, *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*, volume 66, 1913-4; "Race Degeneration", by R. McG. Carruth, *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*, 1919-20.

In addition, given the fact that over the years, Angola prisoners were occasionally used as guinea pigs for medical experiments, it is plausible that women were victims of “therapeutic abortions”. Indeed, in its search for subjects for experimentation, the medical community always favored “caged subjects”, who would “simultaneously expiate their debt to society and protect others”. Black prison subjects were “almost as legally invisible as the slaves in antebellum experiments” conducted by southern physicians such as Louisianan Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright. Researchers often did not divulge the exact nature of their experiments to prisoners, or the risks entailed. On their part, prisoners might have been compelled to participate, or, encouraged by small monetary gains or other material privileges available to research participants (such as a better diet or more secure surroundings). In the 1950s, Tulane University psychiatrist Dr. Robert Heath conducted psychosurgery experiments on several Angola Black prisoners. Along with his associate from Australia, Dr. Harry Bailey, Heath also conducted CIA-funded drug experiments on African American prisoners, including with LSD and bulbocapnine tested for its capacity to control minds. The damage done was later recognized through an out-of-court settlement with seven of the doctors’ victims¹³⁸². Dr. Heath’s research on schizophrenia was also conducted at Angola. There he injected blood from schizophrenic patients into two male prisoners, who had signed a one-page consent agreement¹³⁸³. Other medical experiments might have been conducted on Black women captives of the LSP, although evidence is hard to interpret. There is a mention in a newspaper article that in the 1910s or early 1920s, prison surgeons (including Dr. Louis Grey Stirling, physician at the “Walls”) “performed an operation that restored [Clementine B.] to her “normal condition”. A medical examination had determined that she was “a pervert”. Nothing else is known on the surgery performed on that Black woman convicted of murder¹³⁸⁴.

These medical experiments, as well as the physicians’ bias in favor of penitentiary authorities over their patients, provide further context for the healthcare that was offered to prisoners at Angola.

¹³⁸² Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 245, 253–54, 256, 260–61, 356–57.

¹³⁸³ Robert G. Heath to Edward Grant, Director of the Department of Institutions, 11 April 1956, folder 1956, Collection P1981-495, Correspondence Ed Grant Department of Institutions, State Penitentiary Records 1952-1964, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge; “2 La. Convicts Volunteer as Guinea Pigs”, *The Times*, May 1, 1956.

¹³⁸⁴ “Where Felons Pay Debts They Owe”, *The Times-Picayune*, September 4, 1921.

The following table reproduces some of the limited information available in the historical records about healthcare provided to women incarcerated at Angola during its first years of operation as a penitentiary-plantation under state control. It seems from these numbers that women constituted seven or eight percent of the individuals treated by Angola physician in 1903-1905, although their proportion in the carceral population was half of that. Over the following decade, one of the official reports states, women were treated 332 times in 1914 and 189 times the following year. The report also provides the number of work days lost: 1,347 in 1914, and almost half the following year: 713. However, the number of women at Camp D barely changed between 1914 and 1915, and there is little indication that their conditions changed so dramatically as to spark fewer illnesses. Rather the smaller number strongly suggests that the medical staff at Angola was perhaps less inclined to acknowledge women's poor health and provide medical assistance, due to the large numbers of work days that were at stake¹³⁸⁵.

¹³⁸⁵ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans.

Table 8.10: Women's cases treated at the Angola Hospital

	Number of cases treated Women	Number of cases treated All penal farm prisoners
November 1903 to April 1904	34	Total: 415 (including Camp D)
January 1 st to December 31 st , 1904	101	Camp A: 241 Camp B: 293 Camp C: 400 Camp E: 442 Total: 1,477 (including Camp D)
From January 1 st to December 31 st , 1905	107	Camp A: 189 Camp B: 298 Camp C: 375 Camp E: 579 Total: 1,548 (including Camp D)

Sources: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial report Calendar Years 1902-1903; Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial report Calendar Years 1904-1905, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC.

During the first decades of the 20th century, Angola prisoners were vulnerable to several diseases. The swamp-like environment of the prison left prisoners vulnerable to malaria, dysentery, and other illnesses. Dr. Ehlert, resident physician at Angola, stated that the four months following the overflow of the penitentiary-plantation in 1912 were accompanied by “a great deal of sickness among the prisoners, principally in the form of malaria and dysentery”¹³⁸⁶. These were not restricted to the male prisoners who had fought the high water of the Mississippi river during the 1912 flood. For instance, one white woman died of malarial fever in 1916. Cramped prison dormitories also created conditions that facilitated the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis. From 1906 to 1929, seven Black women died from TB during their incarceration, including Estella S., a 22-year-old married farm labourer, in December 1909¹³⁸⁷. In the introduction of this dissertation, I suggested that her death might have appeared suspicious to her peers prompting at

¹³⁸⁶ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 92.

¹³⁸⁷ Entry #4201, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911, LSP Collection.

least fifteen of them to unit against their captain in a rebellion. Is it possible that Estella's death was not due to TB but rather to hard labor, poor hygiene conditions, cruel punishment, the lack of medical attention, or a combination of these? These were circumstances shared by all incarcerated Black women, circumstances that were daily attacks on their physical integrity. Prison physicians might have recorded erroneous causes of death to help cover up the deadly impacts of the prison regime. It is also possible that prisoners' immune system was undermined by the prison regime, which made them even more vulnerable to contagious diseases such as TB. Then, prison physicians could just note what ultimately led to death, without acknowledging its real causes.

Sick prisoners would be cared for at Angola where there was little equipment or medical staff. They were transferred to the penitentiary general hospital in Baton Rouge (at the "Walls") or after its closing in 1932 to Charity Hospital in New Orleans only if their conditions were severe enough. For instance, Audrey A. was at the "Walls" when she died, allegedly from cancer of the stomach. For her part, Ruby C. was given two furloughs over her four-year sentence at LSP to be cared for at Charity Hospital: one of twelve months and then, after she had come back only a few weeks, another of six months. The record does not state her medical condition. No doubt it was very serious to allow for such an exceptional situation¹³⁸⁸. A new tuberculosis hospital was finally created in 1940 at Camp H, at some distance from Angola general hospital, to limit contagion. In 1918, the worldwide influenza pandemic hit Angola, and one Black female prisoner died.

Sexually transmitted diseases were also prevalent among the carceral population at Angola. One of them, syphilis, was quite common in the first decades of the 20th century, particularly in urban areas where prostitution was considered as a main factor of propagation. In addition to the characteristic skin lesions it caused, syphilis could affect internal organs and cause a wide range of health problems, including sterility. At LSP, "venereal diseases" (or "V.D.") as they were called were a concern; they appeared in official reports to the legislature. For instance, in 1906,

¹³⁸⁸ Entries #457, #2088, #2451, Volume 10, no. 1-3800, 1901-1907; Entry #4021, Volume 11, no. 3801-6800, 1907-1911; Entry #8615, Volume 17, no. 6801-9900, 1911-1916; Entry #11868, Volume 18, no. 9901-12855, 1916-1921; Entry #18397, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929; Entry #24862, Entry #24862, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935, LSP Collection.

the resident physician on Angola penal farm treated ten cases of syphilis and fifteen other cases of “V.D.”; in 1907, he treated seventeen cases of syphilis and thirteen other cases of “V.D.”¹³⁸⁹.

A 1929 report from the Committee on the Care and Training of Delinquent Women and Girls, a federal initiative of the National Bureau of Labor, suggest that venereal diseases were prevalent in prisons throughout the country¹³⁹⁰. In the early 1930s, the Wickersham Commission reported that twenty percent of federal prisoners examined had a venereal disease¹³⁹¹. Also in the early 1930s, the Gluecks found that two fifths of the women who were the subjects of their *Five Hundred Delinquent Women* had contracted a venereal disease before the age of 21. The scholars attributed this high prevalence to “their lack of control of the sex impulse,” thereby revealing the prejudices they carried in regard to the subjects of their study. Even though they knew that half of the women had been occasional or professional sex workers, they did not acknowledge that this activity put them at a high risk of contamination¹³⁹².

Since most carceral institutions did not have facilities to separate sick individuals from the other prisoners, contamination was a risk. Prison authorities were also reluctant to lose prisoners’ labor. They thus did not separate them, which instead fostered conditions for propagation. This was the situation at the Missouri State penitentiary in 1919-1920, when Kate Richards O’Hare was incarcerated:

The women who were too ill to work in the shop were used in the dining room. Practically all of them were tubercular and syphilitic. I have seen women ladling out the food we were compelled to eat with syphilitic pus oozing out of their bodies and the germs of consumption being sprayed over our food by coughing convicts. The most

¹³⁸⁹ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1906-1907, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Report of the physicians, pages 67-68.

¹³⁹⁰ The Committee on the Care and Training of Delinquent Women and Girls of the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor, standards, “*Minimum standards for the Prevention and Treatment of Venereal Diseases in Correctional Institutions*”.

¹³⁹¹ U.S. National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (Wickersham Commission), *Report on Penal Institutions, Probation and Parole*.

¹³⁹² Detailed individual records of the Massachusetts Reformatory (where the Gluecks conducted their study) allowed them to observe that three quarters of the women had illicit sex practices before marriage. More than half of them had had illegitimate pregnancies. The institution even asked the women about their first sexual intercourse and about twenty percent admitted that it was characterized by rape. At the Massachusetts Reformatory, being affected by a venereal disease could be a motive to postpone a release from the institution on parole. Glueck and Glueck, *Five Hundred Delinquent Women*, 96.

loathsome and frightful of my prison experiences had to do with filthy diseases and disgraceful methods of dealing with them¹³⁹³.

Due to the high risk of contagion, the Committee on the Care and Training of Delinquent Women and Girls advised correctional institutions to proceed to a systematic examination upon admission to detect venereal diseases or other medical conditions and offer adequate treatment. This, they stated in their 1929 report, could be done either in prison or in an outside hospital if necessary, as it was the case in some institutions such as the National Training School for Girls in Washington, D.C.¹³⁹⁴. It would take another decade and several more deaths at Angola, including Camp D's Black resident Carrie Lilly B. who died from typhoid and syphilis in June 1936, to enforce these measures¹³⁹⁵. The biennial report for 1938-1940 states that the "Wasserman [sic] test for syphilis is given all inmates, and when the result is positive approved anti-syphilitic treatment is administered"¹³⁹⁶. Prior to this, according to LSP physician Myron A. Walker: "syphilis was largely undiagnosed and untreated, and infected individuals allowed to mingle freely with the others". In 1940-1941, a survey of syphilis was conducted. Four thousand individuals were administered Wassermann and Kahn tests, and 630 Angola prisoners were found syphilitic (in addition, twelve thousand typhoid inoculations were given and each new prisoner was inoculated upon admission to the penitentiary)¹³⁹⁷. The following decade, *The Angolite* reported that an injection of bicillin was given all prisoners who tested positive for gonorrhoea and syphilis (bicillin is an anti-biotic treatment also know as penicillin G; penicillin was found to be a cure for syphilis in 1943). This procedure was conducted at the "V.D. clinic" by the Louisiana State Health Department who sent staff to Angola for the occasion¹³⁹⁸. Given the lack of proper medical installations and staff, it was not infrequent to rely on external resources such as the Louisiana State Health Department to provide healthcare to Angola prisoners.

¹³⁹³ Franklin, *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America*, 83.

¹³⁹⁴ Mrs. Jennie A. Griffith, The Training of Delinquent Girls, in National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor, *"The Delinquent Girl and Woman: Proceedings of a Conference of the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor"*.

¹³⁹⁵ Entry #24822, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935, LSP Collection.

¹³⁹⁶ Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 18.

¹³⁹⁷ State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Biennium Report for the Period Ending June 30, 1942, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC. Quote on page 233.

¹³⁹⁸ *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 6, May 9, 1953.

LSP physician Myron A. Walker stated that: “Upon my arrival here October 1st, 1940, I made a survey of the existing medical situation and found it to be not far short of revolting”. Walker described the inadequacy of the installations as well as the lack of personnel and proper equipment and the need for care from about 3,000 prisoners and 50 “free families”¹³⁹⁹. I reproduced here a table put together by Dr. Walker to compare medical installations and personnel at Angola with other U.S. penitentiaries. This shows that Angola was poorly equipped to provide care for its prisoners in comparison to most other carceral institutions listed here, which were of similar size.

Table 8.11: Results of a Comparative Study of Health Services conducted by Dr. Walker circa 1942

	Angola	San Quentin	Folsom	Oklahoma	Kentucky	Attica	Sing Sing
Population in prison	2,960	4,143	2,465	3,000	3,000	2,200	2,600
Hospital beds	45	150	91	50	349	50	84
Permanent medical staff	2	6	3	1	5	2	5
Visiting staff	0	11	3	7	5	1	18
Psychiatrist	no	2	1	?	?	?	1 + 1 psychologist
Inmate personnel	24	80	24	9	39	17	55

Source: “The Penitentiary Hospital and the Health Situation at Angola”, by Myron A. Walker M.D., Medical Director and Chief Surgeon, undated, Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.5, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

¹³⁹⁹ “The Penitentiary Hospital and the Health Situation at Angola”, by Myron A. Walker M.D., Medical Director and Chief Surgeon, undated, Mss 184, Series IX, Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.5, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

Dental care was also deficient at Angola. For several decades, no dentist was available. The absence of a dentist on the penitentiary grounds was problematic, not only for the prisoners, but also for the families of the staff living at Angola. For instance, in 1915, Mrs. Reynolds, the station agent's wife, died from abscessed teeth. She could not see a dentist in time, as had been recommended by the West Feliciana Parish coroner, Dr. Taylor, who had examined her. In the absence of other medical staff, the local coroner was probably the only physician available at the time¹⁴⁰⁰.

Twenty years later, the only dentist came from Baton Rouge once a month to Angola. Dr. Lament pulled teeth "at a dollar a throw". According to prisoner William Sadler, the dentist was "an adept at extraction - often pulling two or three where one would suffice" since he was paid by the tooth. He also often bought, "for ten or fifteen cents a piece, the gold crowns off the teeth he had pulled". Indeed the LSP contract with Lament "specified that the dentist was to extract teeth only, on the state's bill". Any other dental work he did on his monthly visits was to be paid for by prisoners themselves. Dr. Lament came with "a foot-power grinding machine". "His 'other work' often amounted to tidy sum, even though his bill for a Sunday's tooth-pulling often went over \$75. He made dentures, did fillings, and other dental work for which a stiff price was charged". In-between his monthly visits, prisoners could resort to ask the prisoner acting as hospital steward: he "will oblige you, using a pair of pliers"¹⁴⁰¹. According to *The Argus*, in November 1940, "a long term man of recognised ability" had started providing minor dental treatment to the incarcerated in addition to the "regular dental attention supplied thru the State Hospital Board". This prisoner (most probably a white man) completed examinations, extractions, treatments and amalgam fillings "at a considerable saving in both time and money to the state"¹⁴⁰².

Finally in the early 1940s, following pressure from Dr. Walker, the "dental society" sent a dentist and a dental trailer. A laboratory was made out of it, to be able to provide dentures¹⁴⁰³.

¹⁴⁰⁰ "Death From Abscessed Teeth", *The True Democrat*, January 2, 1915.

¹⁴⁰¹ William Sadler's Angola Diary "Lest we forget" account of 1936, published in *The Angolite*, Volume 1, no. 21, August 15, 1953; "Hell on Angola", *The New Orleans Item*, July 15, 1943.

¹⁴⁰² *The Argus*, Volume 1, no. 5, December 25, 1940.

¹⁴⁰³ State of Louisiana, Advisory Committee to the Department of Institutions, Sub-Committee on Penal Institutions, Hearing conducted at Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola, Louisiana, 1-2 February 1944, Mss 184, Series IX,

Due to the lack of medical staff, prisoners were used as hospital stewards or nurses. Before the establishment of a general hospital at Angola, each camp had a small hospital section with one of their prisoners assigned to it. According to Angola physician William G. Smith, in 1910-1911, one of the three white women incarcerated at Camp D served her time as “nurse and stewardess to the sick”. None of the white women had medical qualifications beforehand. Those who were not housewives were domestic laborers or simply laborers.

Historical records attest to the assignment of eight Black female prisoners to Camp D “hospital” where minor cases were treated. They were listed as either “hospital steward”, “assistant hospital steward” or “nurse” (the records do not provide details on the distinctions between these assignments). These women had in common their convictions for crimes against persons, consistent with LSP policy of preferring alleged violent criminals over prisoners convicted of crimes against property for trusty positions. Six of them were convicted of manslaughter, one of murder and the other for shooting with intent to murder. It is thus quite ironic that they were chosen to care for other prisoners’ health and well-being. One of the women, Dorothy G., a resident of Baton Rouge, declared on admission that her father was born in Philippines, confirming the early presence of Asian immigrants in Louisiana. The press did not make any mention of her mixed heritage. She killed a Black man in front of a Black-owned restaurant, she associated with Blacks; for the press, she was simply Black¹⁴⁰⁴. Incidentally, she is the only Black woman in the Angola Women’s Database with a foreign parent. Evelyn S. was another hospital stewardess. The Black man she had allegedly stabbed in New Orleans was transported to Charity Hospital where he underwent surgery. The “knife blade had entered the left ventricle in the middle of the heart, and had left gash three-fourths of an inch wide”. Six stiches were made in his heart, and “Six hours after the wound, the man was alive and talkative”. First charged with “stabbing and dangerously wounding”, Evelyn S. was eventually convicted of manslaughter

Publications, Subseries IX.4 Studies 1933-1977, Call number 184-26, Folder 215.6, Department of Institutions, Bureau of Governmental Research Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections, University of New Orleans. Quote on page 60.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Entry #18308, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929, LSP Collection; “Negress Charged with Manslaughter Friday”, *Morning Advocate*, August 25, 1928; “Negro Is Shot While Seated in Automobile”, *Morning Advocate*, August 24, 1928.

because the man eventually passed away despite medical efforts to save him¹⁴⁰⁵. Two of the female hospital attendants at Angola were granted furlough to be cared for at Charity Hospital, which suggests that their assignment at Camp D “hospital” was probably motivated by their being physically unable to perform more demanding tasks. Two others were paroled and two others were granted sentence commutation, even as another woman benefitted from a reprieve. Again, this confirms that trustees could access earlier discharges than other prisoners¹⁴⁰⁶.

Dr. Ehlert, one of the Angola physicians acknowledged that prisoners coerced to care for other prisoners played a crucial role in the healthcare provided by the institution:

I wish also to commend the faithful and untiring service rendered by the hospital stewards assigned to the various quarters. The conscientious and intelligent work of these prisoners has contributed largely to the excellent health and low death rate among their fellow prisoners and has assisted materially in my work¹⁴⁰⁷.

Over the years, as medical procedures were extended, authorities relied more and more on prisoners’ coerced labor in the prison hospital. In 1960, thirty-three prisoners were working as technicians in the Angola hospital, with only five “free personnel”. They were assigned to tasks as varied as: “x-ray technician”, “lab technician”, “dental technician”, “emergency room men”, “nurses”, and “surgical nurses, that assist the doctor in operations”¹⁴⁰⁸.

Distrusted by prison physicians implicated with the brutal prison regime who occasionally used them as guinea pigs, it seems that sick Black women could only count on compassion from those of their peers forced to care for them because the state made use of their reproductive labor¹⁴⁰⁹.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Entry #16176, Volume 27, no. 16151-16824, 1925-1926, LSP Collection; “Six Stiches in Heart, Victim of Stabbing Affray Will Live, Hospital Physicians Predict”, *The Times-Picayune*, November 16, 1925.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Entry #15525, Volume 26, no. 15501-16150, 1926; Entries #16176, #16629, Volume 27, no. 16151-16824, 1925-1926; Entry #17812, Volume 29, no. 17501-18150, 1927-1928; Entry #18308, Volume 30, no. 18151-18800, 1928-1929; Entry #21517, Volume 35, no. 21401-22050, 1931-1932; Entry #24862, Volume 40, no. 24651-25300, 1934-1935; Entry #25439, Volume 41, no. 25301-25950, 1935, LSP Collection.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC. Quote on page 93.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Transcripts, October 3, 1960, Transcripts, October 1960 & March 1961, State Penitentiary Investigations, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Collection P1981-497, folder 34, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge. Quote on pages 103-105.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues that the appropriation of reproductive (or caring) labor was an integral part of slavery, convict leasing and other forms of coercion. See: Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor”; Glenn, *Forced to Care*.

Conclusion of chapter 8

Over the period 1901-1935, observations were made at Angola of Black women's health conditions pre-incarceration. These observations recorded that the women arrived with bodies already marked by the hardships of Black life under Jim Crow. For instance, a third of them might not have had an adequate nutrition before their incarceration. Among these hardships was also the lack of access to health care, particularly dental care - a situation that they would also face in prison. In addition, disciplinary measures located in the historical record suggest that some Black women were victimized more than others. However, they also suggest that the mere possibility of (arbitrary) violence created an emotional climate of fear for all prisoners. In addition, the isolation of women within the penitentiary, and the absence of written and clearly enunciated rules of conduct for them, were factors that could result in imposition of arbitrary disciplinary measures. Examples of corporal punishment, such as the ones mentioned here, fit into what Sykes described as "deprivation of security"¹⁴¹⁰. Of course, the racial and gender hierarchies, which also prevailed in Jim Crow Louisiana outside of the penitentiary, were exacerbated by such carceral settings, thereby reinforcing prisoners' vulnerability to different forms of violence (including sexual violence) from other prisoners, including the trustees, as well as from prison staff, that would not all have been recorded as disciplinary measures. It is easy to imagine that insecurity and wariness toward others would have been pervasive among prisoners, although records also reveal some alliances between individuals that suggest that real solidarity was also possible among the incarcerated. African American women associated together to alleviate some of the deprivation of their imprisonment, and to protect each other from white supremacy as they were doing in the outside world.

¹⁴¹⁰ Sykes, *The Society of Captives*, 76-78.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation examines penitentiary official sources to document the lived experiences of African American women who were incarcerated at Angola, a penitentiary-plantation, during Jim Crow segregation. It covers the period 1901-1961, during which women were held in a male-dominated custodial institution. This research covered about a thousand individuals, drawing from admission records (1901-1935) and from other archival sources in order to produce data for quantitative and qualitative analysis. The results are not only statistics about the LSP Black female carceral population or even the dozens of individual stories presented here. Beyond these, this dissertation allows us to better understand the impact of race and gender on prisoners' experiences. Adopting and applying the concept of intersectionality, this project examines the specificities of Black women's experiences of incarceration, in relation to other categories of prisoners (men, white women). More particularly, it offers insight into these experiences along the themes of space, time and the body. In an effort to evaluate the racial and gendered hierarchies at play, this dissertation explores Angola's commonalities and distinctions with other systems of oppression, in particular with antebellum slavery and with Jim Crow segregation in the "outside" world.

During the 19th century, the dominant white society resisted African Americans' emancipation efforts, including through the criminal justice system. When Black individuals came to form the majority of state prisoners in Louisiana, the state penitentiary system was placed under the management of unscrupulous businessmen interested in economic profit. These lessees' hunger for extracting profit from the prisoners was unquestioned by a society marked by entrenched inequalities and racial divisions. As the level of exploitation increased, toward the turn of the 20th century, both the lessees' profit and the death toll of their exploited labor force skyrocketed.

When the state of Louisiana bought the Angola plantation at the dawn of the 20th century, it was with the intention of taking over the “business of convicts” in order to reap as much profit for the state’s coffers as individual businessmen had done before. Coercing Black laborers to cultivate cotton on a former slave plantation seemed the logical thing to do to Louisiana officials, who did not question the state’s racial order. Rather, they worked to maintain white supremacy by designing a powerful institution capable of crushing thousands of lives at a time. In conjunction with other forms of violence (state-sanctioned and otherwise), Angola served the project of white supremacy by standing as a central institution of anti-Black terror. It thereby undermined African Americans’ hopes and efforts for freedom and autonomy. In fact, Angola, as other carceral institutions, participated in the preservation and consolidation of the broader structure of racial domination after the formal abolition of the institution of slavery¹⁴¹¹.

Examining Black female prisoners in this carceral space allows us to decipher the transformative nature of white supremacy over time. For instance, whereas during slavery women were exploited for their reproductive capacities, this was not the case in the carceral system during Jim Crow. The physical separation of men and women was a new feature of this latter system of oppression, whereas during slavery their mingling, although closely controlled by slaveholders, was desirable because the offspring could increase slaveholders’ human property. Although sexual abuse and violence against Black women were indeed present in prison, it was used there as a tool of domination, as had also been the case during slavery. Within the confines of the penitentiary-plantation, hidden from view, and isolated from their communities, Black women were vulnerable to these attacks, even more so than they were in the “outside” world. To be sure, Jim Crow Louisiana was not a welcoming place for Black women. In the “outside”, they had to defend themselves against whites and against men, in order to carve a space for themselves. However, because the prison was a site inherently secluded and secret, it meant that captains and guards could abuse their captives with complete impunity. And they did, despite the repeated denials of penitentiary officials, and their occasional so-called reforms. The negative sexualized stereotypes attached to Black women in Jim Crow society served to neutralize Black women’s claims to respectability and protection, and in turn to rationalize the attacks perpetrated on them,

¹⁴¹¹ Manjapra, *Black Ghost of Empire*, 6.

including rape and corporal punishment. These abuses support the argument that prison served to dominate Black women and maintain them at the bottom of racial and gender hierarchies.

One essential finding of this research is the fact that African Americans' over-representation in prison was more pronounced among women than it was among men. Over the period 1901-1961, despite fluctuations in the population at any given time between three dozen and over two hundred, women represented around four percent of the LSP carceral population. Black female prisoners constituted the over-whelming majority of incarcerated women: nine out of ten over the period 1901-1935 (which speaks to the reluctance of southern courts to convict white women to hard labor except those found guilty of the most serious crimes¹⁴¹²). These women were also young, and at the most productive age for physical labor. In average, they were first admitted to LSP at 25 years of age, but forty percent of them were in fact 21 years old or younger. Black women incarcerated were drawn from working-class African American communities across the state of Louisiana. Almost all of them had previously worked outside their homes for a wage. Most of them occupied menial positions, and a majority were domestic workers, who were constrained to work in white homes because of racial discrimination in other occupations. A third of them were convicted of property crimes (crimes of economic nature), which not only speaks to their poverty but also reveals the deep economic inequalities of Louisiana society. The other two thirds were convicted of crimes against persons, not infrequently committed in situations where they had to defend themselves.

One argument of this research is that Black women's lives in custody were shaped by legacies of the 'longue durée' history of Angola as a place, as well as its peculiar geography. When the penal farm opened in 1901, the site already had a long and resonating history. Before settler colonization, it had been occupied by at least two Indigenous nations, the Houma, and later the Tunica. It became a slave plantation when cotton and sugar cane cultivation spread along the Mississippi valley, and was the property of two significant southern businessmen and white supremacists. The first one, Isaac Franklin, was a major slave trader during the era of the

¹⁴¹² According to an editorial of the African American newspaper *The Chicago Defender*, courts demonstrate a "gallantry apparently tinged with colorphobia" by reserving a differential treatment to women, because of their gender, but only when these were white. "Punishing Women Criminals", *The Chicago Defender*, March 21, 1914. See also: Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 155.

domestic slave trade. The second one, Samuel L. James Sr., was a former Confederate officer and lessee for state prisoners. This contributes to make Angola emblematic of the country's history, born through both the pains of Indigenous genocidal dispossession and displacement and of African slavery.

In addition, the penitentiary-plantation presented the “ideal” geography for the confinement of Black lives. This huge piece of land bounded by the Mississippi River on three sides and the Tunica Hills on the fourth was “shaped like an animal trap”¹⁴¹³. It functioned like a trap for humans. Angola reproduced some of the mechanisms for spatial control used during slavery, such as armed guards placed in the fields to oversee coerced laborers and limit their movements. The spatiality of the prison also mirrored the broader spatial politics of Jim Crow segregation, with a rigid color line separating Blacks from whites and differentiated material conditions for women of both races. The exploration of Black women's spatial experiences revealed a range of material boundaries erected to oppress them as well as a range of behaviors on their part deployed to challenge these boundaries. Given the challenges posed by the geography of the penitentiary-plantation, as well as the presence of armed guards and of bloodhound dogs trained to run after the escapees, Black women's acts of illicit mobility were rare. Nevertheless, the existence of such acts demonstrates their agency and their willingness to resist the prison order and to pursue their dreams of freedom.

In addition to spatial control over prisoners' movements, the carceral institution exerted control over time, limiting the ability of the incarcerated to make decisions about their day and night activities, i.e. how they spent time in custody. The carceral institution also juxtaposed its decision power over the one exercised by criminal courts fixing judicial sentences to determine the time served in custody. Over time, new discharge mechanisms were used to modulate served sentences. As a result, the individualization of sentences increased, giving opportunities for negotiations, but also for more deprivations and control. In that sense, time at Angola can be understood as “a weapon of anti-Black violence”¹⁴¹⁴. The time served in the state penitentiary had

¹⁴¹³ “America's Worst Prison”, *Collier's Magazine*, November 22, 1952.

¹⁴¹⁴ Calvin Warren, “Time for Black Studies Symposium: Time, Temporality and Black Life”, Princeton University, Department of African American Studies, January 2021.

little to do with the severity of the women's alleged crimes. On average, Black women served less than two years at LSP, and served only half of the original term determined by the parish court where they were convicted. On average, white women served a smaller proportion of their original sentence than Black women: white women were more likely to benefit from parole, commutation or pardon, all "back-end" mechanisms which allowed for an earlier discharge. Release mechanisms formed an arsenal of incentives; however, they required compliance with penitentiary rules. They also required the ability to formulate applications and to obtain whites' support, which was harder to get for Black women.

State sentences meant hard labor for all individuals convicted of a felony. However, the meaning of hard labor depended on prisoners' race and gender. The range of labor assignments held by Black women on the penitentiary-plantation followed a racialized and gendered logic, as many other aspects of the discipline at Angola. For instance, Black women were assigned to tasks that were physically demanding and usually considered fit only for men (such as field work), as well as tasks traditionally considered more fit for women (such as domestic tasks). Conversely, white women were assigned to lighter tasks. This differential treatment ensured that white women, even incarcerated, could feel superior to their Black counterparts. Black women's numerous occupations at Angola demonstrate that they were as much as other Black prisoners part of "capitalism's necessary reserve army of labor"¹⁴¹⁵. Although, their economic exploitation alone does not explain why Black women were coerced to work on the penitentiary-plantation. According to scholar Jackie Wang, "Economic exploitation does not explain the phenomena of racialized incarceration". Indeed, anti-Blackness is at the foundation of the U.S. capitalist society, in which prisons are not only embedded but also serve as important cogs¹⁴¹⁶.

Despite the fact that coerced labor occupied most of Black women's time and was crucial for an institution that intended to earn profits on their backs, it does not suffice to explain their experiences of incarceration. By looking at corporal punishment, sexual abuses, medical neglect, and other humiliations Black women were subjected to, but also at the constant negotiations

¹⁴¹⁵ Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 126.

¹⁴¹⁶ Wang, "Against Innocence", 8.

concerning their sentences, this dissertation adopts a wider perspective allowing for a better and more complex understanding of the nature of the oppression at play¹⁴¹⁷.

To be sure, physical and sexual violence was central to the system of violence used to extract labor from African American women at Angola. However, the violence exercised against them was not only meant to transform unwilling workers into productive laborers for the state. I argue that it served to commodify the Black female bodies, and through this, to achieve domination over Black women and to crush their efforts to attain freedom and autonomy. In detention, some Black women were more victimized than others. Nevertheless, I argue that the arbitrary violence omnipotent white male captains exercised created a climate of terror and fear for all of them. More often than not, incarcerated women complied with prison rules and showed deference to their captors in order to avoid more victimization. In doing so, they appeared to submit to the racial and gendered hierarchies prevailing in the carceral settings. However, the historical record holds evidence of some of the resistance that Black women deployed at Angola, even at the price of great retaliation. I argue that Black women's agency and resistance can be found in the various ways they refuse to comply to prison discipline, from dragging their feet to running away. Even knowing that they were unlikely to reverse the power imbalance in their favor, these attempts demonstrate that they were willing to disrupt the prison regime to assert their humanity and dignity. Their efforts were answered with violent repression. Most of the time, the corporal punishment consisted in being struck by a lash. Here again, the institution treated Black women differently than white female prisoners. The latter were subjected to solitary confinement decades before it became the routine punishment for all female prisoners, rather than to corporal punishment. My research demonstrates that the differential disciplinary treatment between African Americans and whites was accentuated among women. Indeed, as demonstrated by previous research, both Black and white male prisoners were punished with the lash at Angola, even though the severity and frequency of punishment inflicted to Black men were greater than what was reserved to white men¹⁴¹⁸.

¹⁴¹⁷ Scott, *La Domination et les arts de la résistance*, 127.

¹⁴¹⁸ Hermann, "Specters of Freedom", 407–9, 460; Tepperman, "Strange Bedfellows", 237, 251.

Black women's experiences at Angola are significant not so much for their divergence from "outside" working-class African American female experiences, but rather for their very embeddedness within Jim Crow Louisiana. The racial and gendered hierarchies existing in the "outside" were replicated in the "inside", albeit with a higher degree of violence. Altogether, the findings of this research support the argument that incarceration was an integral part of the racial project of Louisiana during Jim Crow. "Inside", I argue, the white supremacist project used control over space, time and the Black female body, to maintain and consolidate Black women's domination.

The historical record reveals the fact that prisoners "did time" in various ways, labored in various occupations, and were not all victimized with the same intensity. They also resorted to resistance and compliance in different ways. The individual stories presented in this dissertation highlight the diversity of their experiences of incarceration. Rather than a single standard of Black female experience, my research reveals that there were Black women's experiences. The attention given to individual stories in this project is a purposeful attempt to counter the deindividuation and silence of Black women in institutional archives. However, this dissertation also makes sure that the bigger picture, i.e. the systemic nature of their oppression, is not forgotten¹⁴¹⁹. By doing so, it seeks to provoke reflections on the kind of collective responses needed in the future. More precisely, it invites readers to think about prison abolition in an anti-capitalist, anti-racist and feminist framework. It provides some historical keys to the understanding of current-day practices of mass incarceration, and hopefully it also furnishes motives to its dismantling, in the U.S. and elsewhere.

The limits of this doctoral research arose on different levels. First, in looking at penitentiary admissions, this dissertation can only offer partial evidence as to the criminalization of African American women in Louisiana. It does not reflect the reality of police harassment, or the numerous arrests that did not lead to prosecutions. It also does not reflect the commitments of prisoners to local and parish jails, on which very little is known. The challenges to conducting research on such a scale reside in the number of local agencies involved (sheriff or local police,

¹⁴¹⁹ Wang, "Against Innocence", 2.

district attorney, court in each of the sixty-four Louisiana parishes) and the availability of historical records.

Secondly, as explained in detail in Chapter 2, non-prisoners disproportionately created the primary sources used for this research. This makes it difficult to reconstruct the prison experience as lived by prisoners. Thus, I had to “track them down in what was said about them”¹⁴²⁰. And what was said, or more precisely what was written about them, was generally said or written by hostile white men who despised Black female alleged criminals. It is true of the newspaper journalists who described them as depraved and disorderly. That same disdain can be detected in the information that their captors and oppressors collected about them in prison. Because of the stigma attached to imprisonment, prisoners’ own accounts are rare. In addition, very few women count among those who penned prison writings, especially in the first half of the 20th century¹⁴²¹. Angola’s Black female prisoners did not leave any written record. This limitation is present throughout the field of Black women’s history. One of the factors is that the denial of literacy meant that a lot of their stories remained untold¹⁴²². Because of the paucity of archival material about African American women, historians are left with the task of “narrate from a place of silence”¹⁴²³. Therefore, however thorough the research by the historian, entire facets of their experiences, such as their inner feelings, stayed out of reach. Nevertheless, this dissertation suggests that brutal beatings, sexual abuses, solitary confinement, and the other harms brought by incarceration were traumatic experiences that these women underwent¹⁴²⁴. Although it is harder to imagine, incarcerated Black women also experienced hope. Mostly, they had the hope of freedom, through an earlier discharge, or through an escape. Despite endemic conflict between women incarcerated in the same cramped and dilapidated quarters, there were also collective actions bringing them together and attesting to their solidarity. However, a lot of questions will necessarily remain unanswered.

¹⁴²⁰ [our translation from] “Il faut les traquer dans ce que l’on dit d’eux” in: Perrot, *Les ombres de l’histoire*, 165.

¹⁴²¹ Franklin, *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America*.

¹⁴²² Clark, Clark, and Davey, *Remember My Sacrifice*, liii.

¹⁴²³ Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 147.

¹⁴²⁴ LeFlouria, ““Under the Sting of the Lash,”” 376–77.

Thirdly and finally, the data is temporally uneven, with some information available on parts of the period 1901-1961, but not on others. This makes it challenging to describe the whole period with the same level of detail, and to discern patterns of evolution throughout the period. Some changes in the spatial organization, in the labor assignments or in the camp or penitentiary management were presented here. However, it is not clear how much these changes impacted the core of prisoners' experiences over the period. It seems that Angola inherited a past of brutality and carried on the same old plantation ways. Moreover, the research does not cover the transition towards a female-only state penitentiary. This change, which happened at the end of the period studied in this dissertation, remained incomplete as the sources suggest.

At the end of June 1961, all women were transferred from Angola to St. Gabriel. St. Gabriel was a 2,200-acre penal farm, which had long been operated by the state of Louisiana through male prisoners' coerced labor. Among the hundred women transferred, three quarters were African Americans. According to an outside journalist, *The Angolite* had reported "a general festive-like atmosphere, engendered by the natural anticipation of moving, breaking dull routines, and seeing new sights". However, the news of the move was said to have been received "with mixed emotions", and "those who have husbands or loved ones among the male population of the prison are distressed at the thought of leaving them". Once the women's quarters at Angola were vacated, LSP officials had more space for male state prisoners whose numbers had increased drastically over the years. To be sure, the new "modern" penitentiary (a large structure with several wings) that was built in the 1950s was already full and the old decrepit camps had to be put to use once again¹⁴²⁵. Only a few years after the completion of the new structure built to house 2,500 prisoners, numbers were over 3,300¹⁴²⁶. The "Willows", occupied by women since 1956, provided a better option than these old camps to house these men, although at some point, the over-crowding required requisitioning all structures available. The transfer of women to another location was motivated by this situation, rather than the objective of separating female

¹⁴²⁵ J. Wayne Allgood, Associate Warden, to V.G. Walker, Warden, Memorandum, 14 July 1961; Victor G. Walker to E.R. Anderson, Director of Institutions, Monthly reports, 20 June, 19 July, 22 August 1961, folder 32, Collection P1981-497, Louisiana State Penitentiary Miscellaneous Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge; "St. Gabriel Penal Farm Will Become Facility for Women", by Ed Clinton, *State Times Advocate*, June 20, 1961; "Women Prisoners To Be Relocated", *The Shreveport Journal*, June 21, 1961.

¹⁴²⁶ Board meeting minutes, 21 October 1960, Collection P1983-580, Board meeting minutes, State Penitentiary Records, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

from male prisoners. Indeed, a few years after their transfer, male prisoners were still present at St. Gabriel. For instance, in 1965, there were 70 male prisoners doing farm work in addition to the 130 women housed in a separate camp¹⁴²⁷. At St. Gabriel, a garment factory was established “to give women proper work and physical activity”. Black and white women worked in this factory producing prison clothing, as well as “sheets, pillow cases, towels and blankets, surgical gowns, robes, pajamas and night-gowns that are purchased by state hospitals”. The female prisoners also made “foam rubber mattresses, zip-on mattress covers, and prison uniforms [to be] sold to some of the parish and city jails in Louisiana”. This was described by the LSP authorities as vocational training and a “wonderful therapy for these unfortunates”, who probably would not have agreed with this statement¹⁴²⁸. Budgetary cuts occurred in the early 1960s affecting all Louisiana state correctional institutions. According to former Warden Victor Walker, things slowly began deteriorating to the point “where it looked like it had in the ‘40s”. Walker resigned because “things just fell apart”¹⁴²⁹. By this time, LSP was operating at “at \$1 million less annually than it had in 1960 and previous years”. The budget cuts of Governor Jimmie Davis “had forced the warden to reduce substantially the number of free guards and resulted in big cuts in the education department”¹⁴³⁰. These budget cuts meant that women would have to wait for years before St. Gabriel’s installations could be adequately renovated to accommodate their needs, or before they could have educational or recreational activities. Moreover, their cohabitation with male prisoners and male guards also meant that they were vulnerable to sexual abuses. In May 1968, Clyde Morgan, long-time LSP employee and warden at St. Gabriel, resigned following the revelation of one female prisoner’s pregnancy, resulting from her sexual intercourse with a male guard¹⁴³¹.

The stories of Black female prisoners at St. Gabriel, which would later become the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) still remain to be told. New research will be necessary to document their experiences in this new penal farm. In particular, it would be crucial to learn

¹⁴²⁷ “Escaped Convict From St. Gabriel Caught by Guard”, *Morning Advocate*, August 31, 1965.

¹⁴²⁸ State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1961-1962, Call number HV86.L851, LLMVC. Quotes on pages 26, 30.

¹⁴²⁹ “Angola outliving reputation”, by Melinda Shelton, *Sunday Advocate*, April 29, 1984.

¹⁴³⁰ “Name Walker Again As Angola Warden”, by Martha Wilson, *State Times Advocate*, June 19, 1964.

¹⁴³¹ “Woman Free Short Time Back in Pen”, *Morning Advocate*, February 12, 1969.

how the transition to racial integration was operated in the female penitentiary, and how this transformed the hierarchies at play between women of both races.

As I write, the LCIW is still the only female state penitentiary in Louisiana. However, its almost 1,000 residents were evacuated due to a major flood in August 2016, and have not been brought back to St. Gabriel. Since the 2016 flood, women have been housed in various male facilities in very inappropriate conditions¹⁴³². Fourteen of them, who according to authorities presented greater risks, were placed at Angola, which is now a super maximum-security facility. Today's situation for Louisiana female prisoners is thus ironically closer to what it was during Jim Crow. Plans have been made for a new women's penitentiary to be built a half mile from the closed St. Gabriel facility¹⁴³³. Incarcerated women are still victims of abuses and mistreatment. Solitary confinement is used "liberally" for long period of times. Strip searches are commonplace. Women are handcuffed and shackled to deliver their babies and prison authorities do not even let them hold their newborns after delivery. Women's sexual abuses by male guards are also commonplace¹⁴³⁴. No reform has altered the dehumanizing effect of imprisonment. No institutional reform can humanize a carceral system designed to crush lives. Only struggles led by the incarcerated and those who support them can do so.

¹⁴³² "Temporary has become permanent' for displaced inmates of flooded Louisiana women's prison", by Grace Toohey, *The Advocate*, April 20, 2019. https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/article_0fcebfb8-5d6b-11e9-bac5-f7b4ee1d77f0.html Accessed May 1, 2019; "After Louisiana women's prison flooded in 2016, temporary dorms inundated with coronavirus", by Lea Skene, *The Advocate*, June 7, 2020. https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/coronavirus/article_ed45ea90-a696-11ea-a89d-8b66acee5f8f.html Accessed August 29, 2022.

¹⁴³³ "Louisiana To Build New Prison For Women Displaced By 2016 Storm.", by Lauren Gill, *The Appeal*, October 29, 2019. <https://theappeal.org/louisiana-women-new-prison/> Accessed September 1, 2022.

¹⁴³⁴ Maryam H., who was incarcerated for three decades at LCIW, shared her experience during an assembly of the group Justice & Beyond, at the Cafe Istanbul, New Orleans, on March 9, 2020. This information is corroborated by other accounts by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Black women who participated in the Per(Sister) exhibition at the Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane in 2019.

APPENDIX A: ANGOLA WOMEN'S DATABASE (VARIABLES)

Table A.1: Information available on women in penitentiary records (1901-1935)

Variable name	Description	Appears:
Registered number	LSP identifiant	
Name	Family name, first name, alias	
Gender	"Female"	Only after 1907
Age	Number (of years)	
Height	Number (imperial)	
Weight	Number (imperial)	
Complexion	Skin color	
Eyes	Eyes color	
Hair	Hair color	
Marks on person	Ears pierced, Scars, Vaccination marks, Other bodily marks, Teeth condition, Also contains shoe size	
Marital relations		
Use of tobacco	Yes / no	
Education		Only after 1911
Able to read	Yes / no	1915-1924
Able to write	Yes / no	1915-1924
Able to read & write	Yes / no	Only after 1925
Birthplace	U.S. state or foreign country	
Father's Birthplace	U.S. state or foreign country	Only after 1905
Mother's Birthplace	U.S. state or foreign country	Only after 1905
Religion		Only after 1933
Occupation		
Offence	Conviction	
Term of imprisonment	Length of sentences (number in months or years)	
Parish of conviction		
Time of conviction	Date of the conviction in parish court	
When received	Date of the admission at LSP	
Remarks concerning discharge	Date of discharge (often contains the discharge	

	disposition: ex: Good Time, pardon, etc.)	
Remarks Good Time	Labor assignment (position & period)	Only after 1925
Punishment received ¹⁴³⁵	Date, type of punishment, motive, Captain in charge	Only after 1925
Residence	Place of residence	
Residence / relative or friend		Only after 1921

¹⁴³⁵ In addition, Conduct Records, Volume 14, 1909-1917, provides some partial information on discipline incidents and punishments, that I integrated in the database.

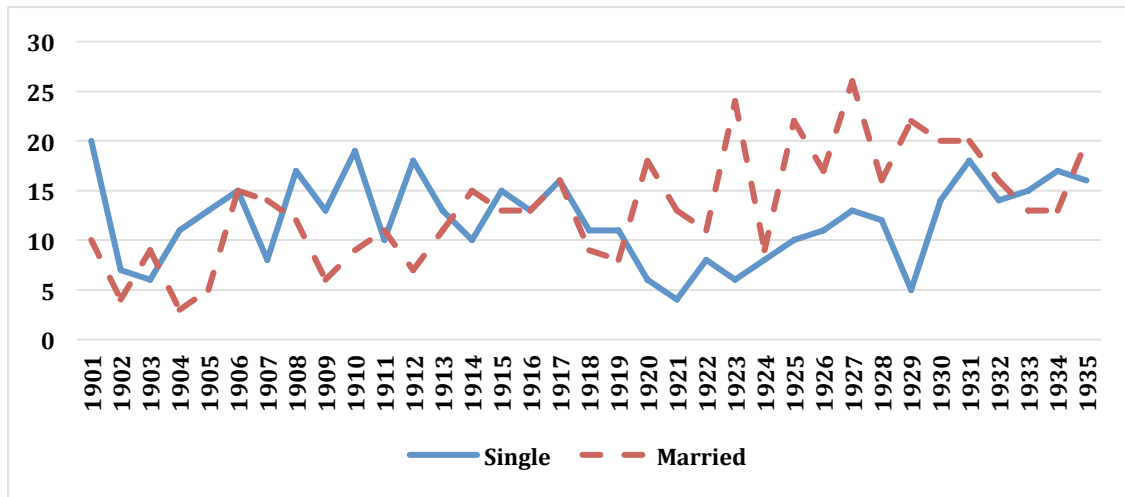
APPENDIX B: MARITAL STATUS

Table B.1: Number and percentage of women per race by marital status (1901-1935)

Marital Relation	Black women		White women	
Single	405	42.1%	15	16.1%
Married	419	43.5%	50	53.8%
Separated	18	1.9%	4	4.3%
Divorced	15	1.6%	5	5.4%
Widow	105	10.0%	19	20.4%
Not available	1	0.1%	0	0.0%
Total	963	100.0%	93	100.0%

Source: Angola Women's Database

Figure B.1: Black and white women's marital status per year (number of women admitted)



Source: Angola Women's Database

Table B.2: Percentage of women per marital status by alleged crime (1901-1935)

Percentage of women per marital status by alleged crime						
Marital relation	Alleged crime					Total
	Crimes against persons	Crimes against persons & property	Crimes against property	Crimes against public morality	Other crimes	
Single	34.8%	30.0%	49.3%	36.8%	27.8%	39.9%
Married	48.2%	45.0%	38.1%	31.6%	55.6%	44.3%
Separated	2.2%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	5.6%	2.1%
Divorced	1.0%	10.0%	2.1%	15.8%	5.6%	1.9%
Widow	13.8%	15.0%	8.4%	15.8%	5.6%	11.8%
Not available	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Angola Women's Database

APPENDIX C: BIRTHPLACE

Table C.1: Female admissions per race by birthplace (1901-1935)

Birthplace	Black women (#)	Black women (%)	White women (#)	White women (%)
Louisiana	755	78.4%	52	55.9%
Other Southern State	201	20.9%	26	28.0%
Other American State	6	0.6%	9	9.7%
Italy		0.0%	4	4.3%
Other foreign country		0.0%	1	1.1%
Not available	1	0.1%	1	1.1%
Total	963	100.0%	93	100.0%

Source: Angola Women's Database

APPENDIX D: STATISTICS COMPILED FROM ANNUAL & BIENNIAL PENITENTIARY REPORTS

Table D.1: LSP population “on hand” or “on record” (1900-1917, 1928-1945, 1952-1962)¹⁴³⁶

	White women	Black women	total # women	total # men	total LSP	% women
December 31, 1901	1	39	40	1102	1142	3.5%
December 31, 1902	2	33	35	1202	1237	2.8%
December 31, 1903	1	29	30	1231	1261	2.4%
December 31, 1904	2	33	35	1358	1393	2.5%
December 31, 1905	3	42	45	1491	1536	2.9%
December 31, 1906	6	53	59	1650	1709	3.5%
January 1, 1908	8	52	60	1754	1814	3.3%
January 1, 1909	7	68	75	1881	1956	3.8%
January 1, 1910	6	60	66	1928	1994	3.3%
January 1, 1911	4	63	67	1980	2047	3.3%
January 1, 1912	4	51	55	1957	2012	2.7%
December 31, 1912	6	54	60	1957	2017	3.0%
December 31, 1913	8	57	65	1971	2036	3.2%
December 31, 1914	7	57	64	1983	2047	3.1%
December 31, 1915	6	54	60	1985	2045	2.9%
December 31, 1916	6	37	43	1787	1830	2.3%
December 31, 1917	3	49	52	1625	1677	3.1%

¹⁴³⁶ The terminology used in reports for the carceral population census changed over time. The introduction of the parole law as well as possibilities of furlough explain why officials started talking about numbers on records, while not every prisoner was in the custody of LSP. The number of individuals placed on parole varied greatly over time.

1918-1927	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	White women	Black women	total # women	total # men	total Angola prison	% women
April 1, 1928	n.a.	n.a.	73	1719	1792	4.1%
April 1, 1929	n.a.	n.a.	76	1973	2049	3.7%
April 1, 1930	n.a.	n.a.	80	2111	2191	3.7%
April 1, 1931	n.a.	n.a.	91	2475	2566	3.5%
April 1, 1932	n.a.	n.a.	96	2788	2884	3.3%
April 30, 1936	18	99	117			
April 30, 1938	19	117	136	3195	3331	4.1%
December 31, 1939	12	121	133	2999	3132	4.2%
June 30, 1940	n.a.	n.a.	149	2994	3143	4.7%
December 31, 1940	n.a.	n.a.	154	2964	3118	4.9%
June 30, 1941	n.a.	n.a.	164	3067	3231	5.1%
June 30, 1942	n.a.	n.a.	177	3145	3322	5.3%
June 30, 1943	n.a.	n.a.	194	3,343	3,537	5.5%
June 30, 1944	n.a.	n.a.	224	3,536	3,760	6.0%
June 30, 1945	n.a.	n.a.	198	3,167	3,365	5.9%
1946-1951	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
July 1, 1952	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2,518	n.a.
June 30, 1953	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2,540	n.a.
1953-1954	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2,554	n.a.
1954-1955	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2,778	n.a.
June 30, 1956¹⁴³⁷	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3,245	n.a.
June 30, 1957	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3,371	n.a.
June 30, 1958	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3,672	n.a.
June 30, 1959	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3,463	n.a.
June 30, 1960	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3,359	n.a.

¹⁴³⁷ Numbers concerning 1956 and subsequent years are numbers in institution, possibly excluding parolees.

June 30, 1961	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3,610	n.a.
June 30, 1962	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3,642	n.a.

Sources: Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Annual Report Calendar Year 1901; Biennial Report Calendar Years 1902-1903; Biennial Report 1904-1905; Biennial Report Calendar Years 1906-1907; Biennial report Calendar Years 1912-1913, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; Board of Control, State Penitentiary, Biennial Report Calendar Years 1908-1909; Biennial Report Calendar Years 1910-1911; Biennial report Calendar Years 1914-1915, Call number 365.3 LP, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans; Report made by Hy. L. Fuqua, General Manager of the State Penitentiary to the Governor and General Assembly of Louisiana for the Regular Session of 1918 Covering the Biennial Period of 1916 and 1917, Call number HV8338.A2, LLMVC; Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Report to His Excellency, The Honorable O.K. Allen Governor of Louisiana and to The Honorable Senators and Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana, May 1932, Call number 365.3 La, Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans; Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936; Biennial Report 1936-1938; Biennial Report 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLCVM; Report of the Department of Institutions of the State of Louisiana for the year October 1940-1941, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888r, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans (hereafter LARC); State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Biennium Report for the period ending June 30, 1942, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM; Annual Report of Department of Institutions, State of Louisiana, Fiscal year ending June 30, 1943, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888r, LARC; Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1943-1944, State of Louisiana, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1944, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM; Louisiana Institutions, Annual Report 1944-1945, State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM; Statistical Report of the Louisiana Department of Institutions, 1952-1953, Call Number HV86.L852, LLCVM; Louisiana Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1955-56; Annual Statistical Report 1956-57; Annual Statistical Report 1957-58, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888s, LARC; Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1958-59, Call Number LaRm HV86.L852, Louisiana Room, University of Louisiana in Lafayette; Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1959-60, Call Number HV86.L852, LLCVM; State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1960-61; Annual Report 1961-1962, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM.

Table D.2: Female admissions to LSP (1934-1936, 1942-1962)

	Black women	white women	women (all)	% Black in total female admissions
1934-1936 (2-yr period)	65	14	79	82.3%
1941-1942	n.a.	n.a.	53	
1942-1943	n.a.	n.a.	40	
1944-1945	n.a.	n.a.	49	
1945-1946	n.a.	n.a.	42	
1946-1947	n.a.	n.a.	46	
1947-1948	n.a.	n.a.	40	
1948-1949	n.a.	n.a.	38	
1949-1950	n.a.	n.a.	27	
1951-1952	n.a.	n.a.	20	
1952-1953	n.a.	n.a.	32	
1953-1954	n.a.	n.a.	39	
1954-1955	2%	1%		
1955-1956	35	10	45	77.8%
1956-1957	45	13	58	77.6%
1957-1958	38	20	58	65.5%
1958-1959	42	28	70	60.0%
1959-1960	29	20	49	59.2%
1960-1961	25	24	49	51.0%
1961-1962	26	18	44	59.1%
<i>total 1955-1962</i>	<i>240</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>373</i>	<i>64.3%</i>
total 1934-1962	n.a.	n.a.	878	

Sources: Louisiana State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Biennial Report 1934-1936; Biennial Report 1936-1938; Biennial Report 1938-1940, Call number HV8338.A2, LLCVM; Report of the Department of Institutions of the State of Louisiana for the year October 1940-1941, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888r, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans (hereafter LARC); State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Biennium Report for the period ending June 30, 1942, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM; Annual Report of Department of Institutions, State of Louisiana, Fiscal year ending June 30, 1943, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888r, LARC; Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1943-1944, State of Louisiana, Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1944, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM; Louisiana Institutions, Annual Report 1944-1945, State of Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM; Statistical Report of the Louisiana Department of Institutions, 1952-1953, Call Number HV86.L852, LLCVM; Louisiana Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1955-56; Annual Statistical Report 1956-57; Annual Statistical Report 1957-58, Call Number 976.3 (360.61) L888s, LARC; Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1958-59, Call Number LaRm HV86.L852, Louisiana Room, University of Louisiana in Lafayette; Department of Institutions, Annual Statistical Report 1959-60, Call Number HV86.L852, LLCVM; State of

Louisiana, Department of Institutions, Annual Report 1960-61; Annual Report 1961-1962, Call number HV86.L851, LLCVM.

APPENDIX E: PARISH OF CONVICTION

Table E.1: Number of Black women admitted per parish of conviction & by decade of admission

Number of Black women per parish by decade					
Parish	Decade of admission				Total
	1901-1909	1910-1919	1920-1929	1930-1935	
Acadia	5	2	3	1	11
Allen	0	3	5	3	11
Ascension	4	4	4	1	13
Assumption	1	2	0	0	3
Avoyelles	0	4	1	1	6
Beauregard	0	6	12	3	21
Bienville	1	2	2	0	5
Bossier	4	3	3	7	17
Caddo	21	24	13	13	71
Calcasieu	6	9	7	6	28
Caldwell	2	0	1	2	5
Catahoula	1	0	0	3	4
Claiborne	0	1	3	3	7
Clairborne	0	0	1	0	1
Concordia	3	5	4	6	18
De Soto	1	1	3	3	8
E. Baton Rouge	6	18	15	16	55
E. Carroll	7	2	15	5	29
E. Feliciana	4	5	3	2	14
Evangeline	0	0	1	0	1
Franklin	2	4	1	3	10
Grant	1	3	5	4	13
Iberia	2	10	1	3	16
Iberville	4	9	3	2	18
Jackson	2	0	0	2	4
Jefferson	2	1	8	3	14
Jefferson Davis	0	2	3	0	5
La Salle	0	1	2	0	3
Lafayette	3	7	2	1	13
Lafourche	3	2	3	3	11
Lasalle	0	0	1	0	1
Lincoln	1	1	0	2	4

Livingston	1	0	1	0	2
Madison	6	5	13	7	31
Morehouse	4	1	4	5	14
Natchitoches	1	2	2	3	8
Orleans	44	22	50	43	159
Ouachita	3	14	9	10	36
Pointe Coupée	2	4	3	2	11
Rapides	6	7	9	5	27
Red River	1	1	0	1	3
Richland	0	0	3	3	6
Sabine	0	2	1	0	3
Saint John The Baptist	2	3	2	4	11
St. Bernard	0	3	1	0	4
St. Charles	3	1	0	0	4
St. James	2	3	0	0	5
St. Landry	1	2	1	1	5
St. Martin	5	3	0	0	8
St. Mary	1	4	1	0	6
St. Tammany	2	9	3	7	21
St.James	0	0	1	0	1
St.John The Baptist	0	0	0	1	1
St.Landry	0	0	1	2	3
St.Mary	0	0	0	1	1
St.Tammany	0	0	0	2	2
Tangipahoa	2	9	7	5	23
Tensas	5	1	7	3	16
Terrebonne	5	1	2	1	9
Union	1	0	0	2	3
Vermilion	1	3	0	0	4
Vernon	2	2	3	1	8
W. B. Rouge	6	16	2	1	25
W. Carroll	0	0	2	1	3
W. Feliciana	2	4	0	1	7
Washington	0	13	5	9	27
Webster	4	7	2	1	14
Winn	2	3	4	3	12
Total	200	276	264	223	963

Source: Angola Women's Database

Table E.2: Number of white women per parish of conviction

Parish of conviction for white women (1901-1935)	
Parish of conviction	
Acadia	2
Allen	1
Beauregard	2
Bienville	2
Bossier	1
Caddo	4
Calcasieu	3
Caldwell	2
Claiborne	5
De Soto	1
E. Baton Rouge	7
E. Carroll	1
Grant	2
Iberia	2
Lafayette	1
Lincoln	1
Livingston	1
Morehouse	2
Natchitoches	2
Orleans	15
Ouachita	9
Rapides	4
Red River	1
Richland	1
Sabine	1
St. Charles	2
St. Mary	2
St. Tammany	1
Tangipahoa	2
Terrebonne	2
Union	3
Vernon	1
W. Feliciana	1
Washington	4
Webster	2
Total	93

Source: Angola Women's Database

Table E.3: Number of Black women per parish by alleged crime for the five (5) main parishes of conviction (1901-1935)

Parish of conviction	Alleged crime					Total
	Crimes against persons	Crimes against persons & property	Crimes against property	Crimes against public morality	Other crimes	
Orleans	62	5	89	1	2	159
Caddo	35	0	35	0	1	71
East Baton Rouge	22	0	33	0	0	55
Ouachita	22	2	10	1	1	36
Madison	26	0	5	0	0	31
Total	167	7	172	2	4	352

Source: Angola Women's Database

APPENDIX F: FEMALE ADMISSIONS

Table F.1: Number of women admitted per year by race (1901-1935)

Year	Black women admitted	White women admitted	Total women admitted	Total number of admissions	% female admissions
1901	28	3	31	558	5.6%
1902	13	1	14	580	2.4%
1903	17	0	17	481	3.5%
1904	16	1	17	503	3.4%
1905	21	1	22	561	3.9%
1906	31	3	34	723	4.7%
1907	24	2	26	606	4.3%
1908	31	2	33	703	4.7%
1909	19	1	20	744	2.7%
1910	32	0	32	752	4.3%
1911	22	1	23	631	3.6%
1912	29	0	29	632	4.6%
1913	24	4	28	684	4.1%
1914	31	2	33	810	4.1%
1915	29	6	35	912	3.8%
1916	27	2	29	713	4.1%
1917	36	0	36	691	5.2%
1918	23	0	23	500	4.6%
1919	23	3	26	559	4.7%
1920	24	1	25	488	5.1%
1921	18	1	19	725	2.6%
1922	21	0	21	721	2.9%
1923	26	4	30	566	5.3%
1924	16	6	22	526	4.2%
1925	37	4	41	729	5.6%
1926	27	3	30	766	3.9%
1927	38	2	40	756	5.3%
1928	29	2	31	854	3.6%
1929	28	2	30	896	3.3%
1930	33	9	42	1,072	3.9%
1931	49	5	54	1,321	4.1%

1932	33	5	38	1,317	2.9%
1933	35	6	41	1,174	3.5%
1934	37	7	44	1,076	4.1%
1935	36	4	40	1,119	3.6%
Total period	963	93	1,056	26,449	4.0%

Source: Angola Women's Database

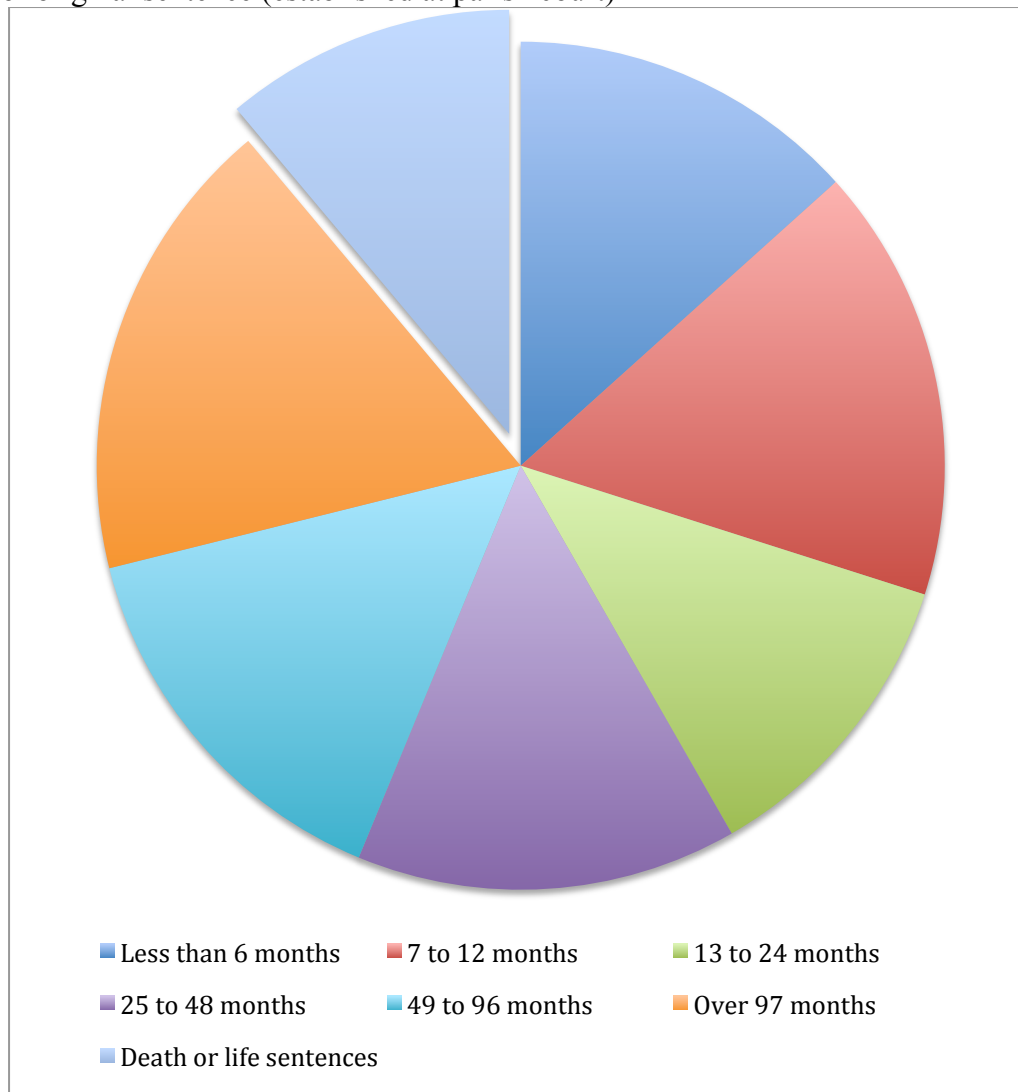
Table F.2: Number of women admitted per race by decade of admission by crime category

Number of women admitted per race by decade by the alleged crime								
Decade (of admission)			Alleged crime					Total
			Crimes against persons	Crimes against persons and property	Crimes against property	Crimes against public morality	Other crimes	
1901-1909	Race	Black	108	1	89	2	4	204
		White	8	1	5	0	0	14
	Total		116	2	94	2	4	218
1910-1919	Race	Black	175	5	90	4	2	276
		White	12	0	2	4	0	18
	Total		187	5	92	8	2	294
1920-1929	Race	Black	169	2	87	3	4	265
		White	6	2	12	4	1	25
	Total		175	4	99	7	5	290
1930-1935	Race	Black	135	4	78	1	5	223
		White	10	5	18	1	2	36
	Total		145	9	96	2	7	259
Total	Race	Black	587	12	344	10	15	968
		White	36	8	37	9	3	93
Total			623	20	381	19	18	1061

Source: Angola Women's Database

APPENDIX G: SENTENCE LENGTH

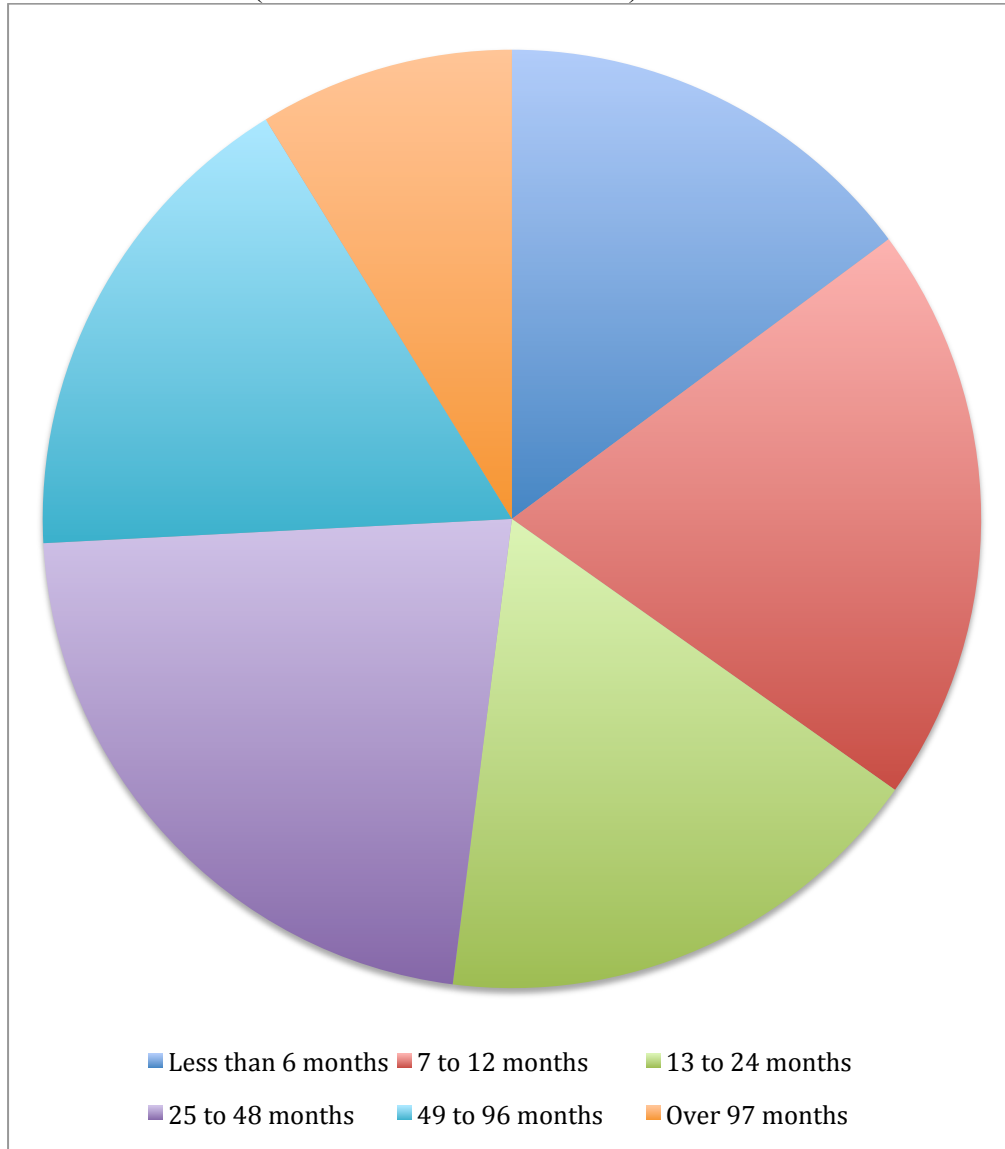
Figure G.1: Black women convicted of crimes against persons (admitted 1901-1935), by length of original sentence (established at parish court)¹⁴³⁸



Source: Angola Women's Database

¹⁴³⁸ For indeterminate sentences, the maximum was used.

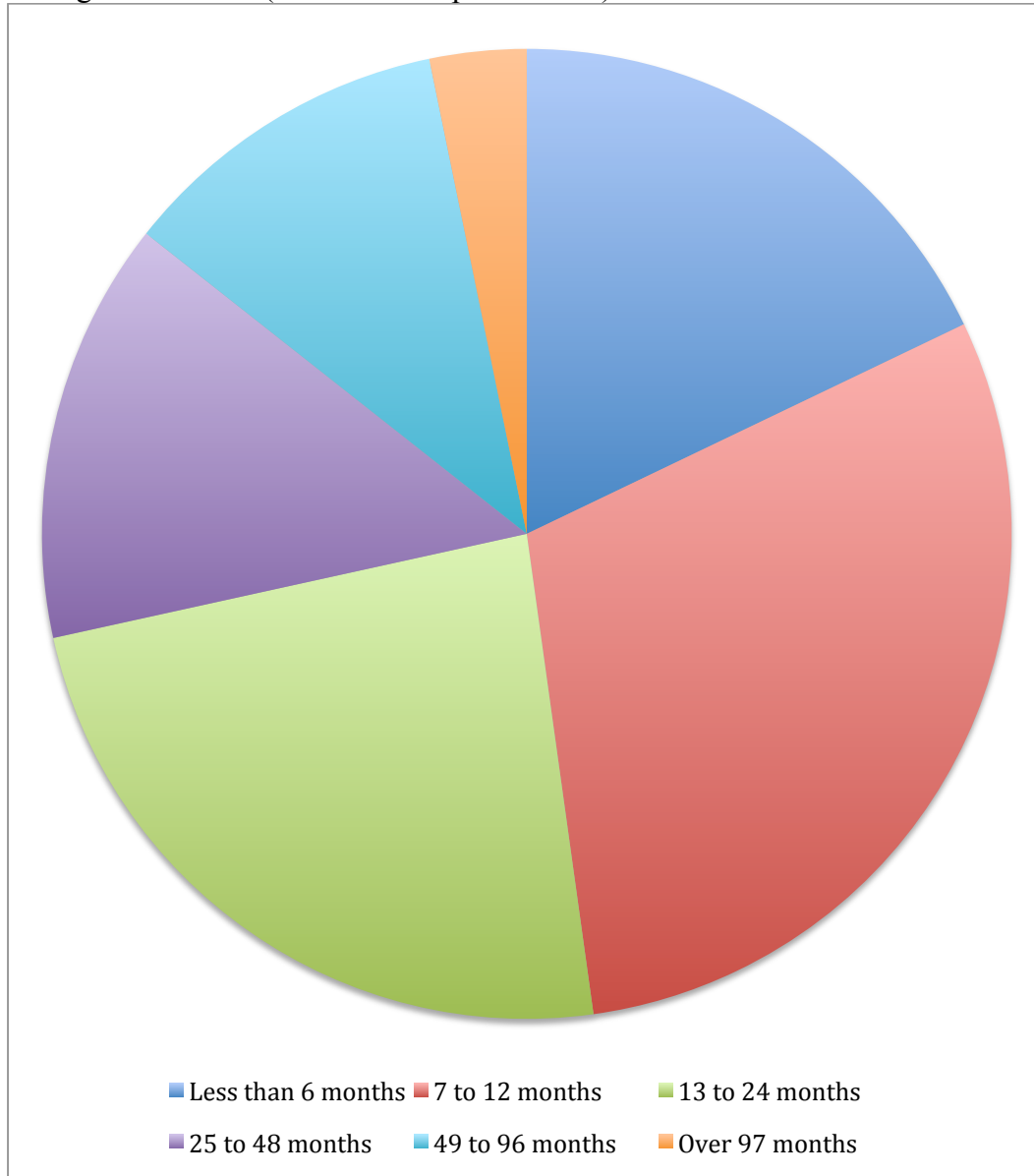
Figure G.2: Black women convicted of crimes against persons (admitted 1901-1935), by length of sentence served (time served inside & outside)¹⁴³⁹



Source: Angola Women's Database

¹⁴³⁹ The time outside served on parole, furlough or otherwise was included in the calculation.

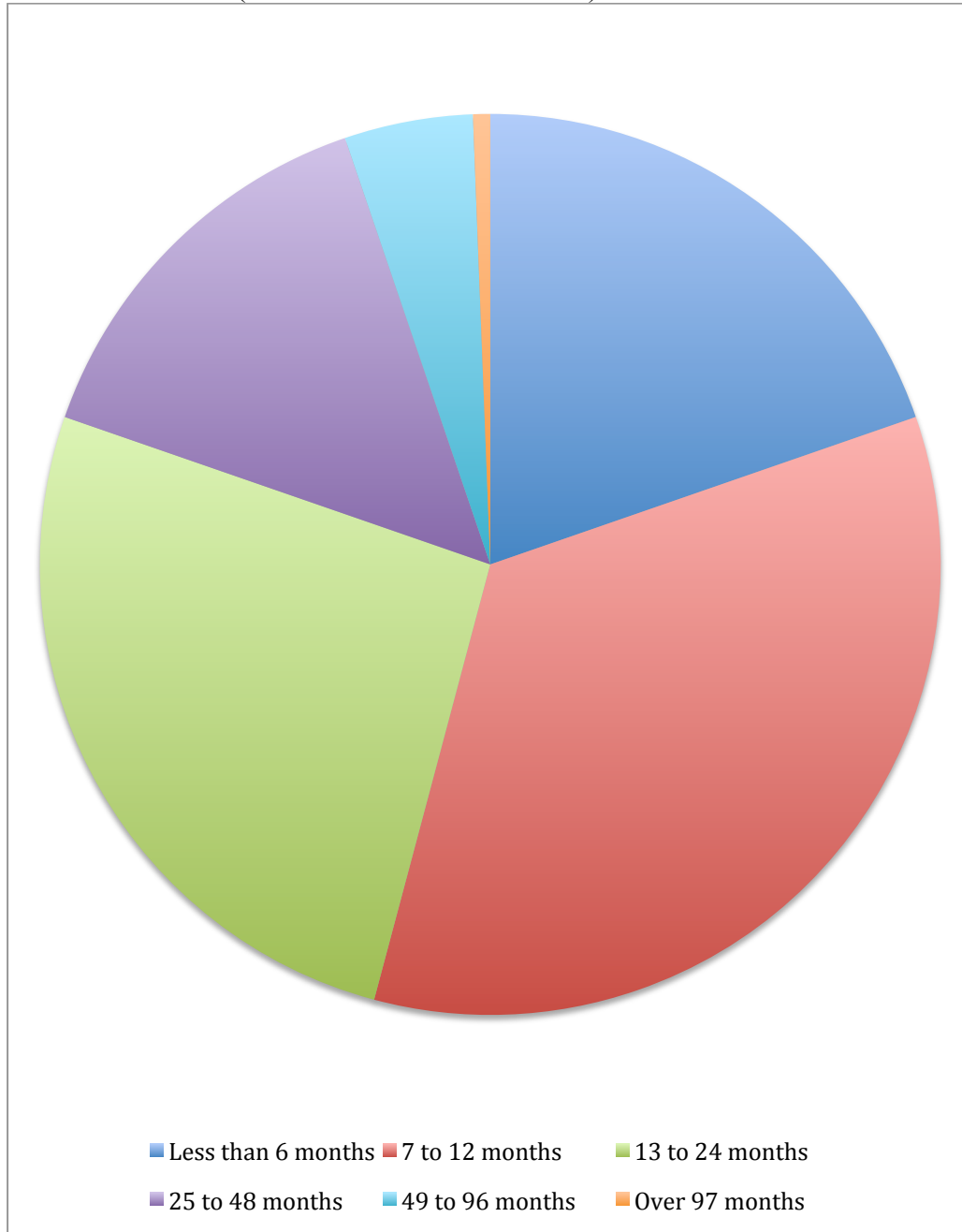
Figure G.3: Black women convicted of crimes against property (admitted 1901-1935), by length of original sentence (established at parish court)¹⁴⁴⁰



Source: Angola Women's Database

¹⁴⁴⁰ For indeterminate sentences, the maximum was used.

Figure G.4: Black women convicted of crimes against property (admitted 1901-1935), by length of sentence served (time served inside & outside)¹⁴⁴¹



Source: Angola Women's Database

¹⁴⁴¹ The time outside served on parole, furlough or otherwise was included in the calculation.

APPENDIX H: STATISTICS ON WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT

Table H.1: National distribution of employment among major industry group, by “color”

	March 1940		April 1950	
	Non-white women	White women	Non-white women	White women
Agriculture	16.1%	2.4%	10.7%	3.1%
Manufacturing	3.5%	23.7%	9.6%	24.6%
Wholesale and retail trade	4.2%	20.5%	10.3%	23.9%
Service industries	74.3%	43.8%	64.8%	35.9%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census¹⁴⁴²

¹⁴⁴² Quoted in Mary S. Bedell, *Income of Negro Workers, 1940-52*, Department of Labor, Office of Publication.

APPENDIX I: OCCUPATION BEFORE INCARCERATION

Table I.1: Percentage of Black domestic workers by decade of admission among Black women admitted at LSP over 1901-1935 (n=963)

Occupation	1900-1909	1910-1919	1920-1929	1930-1935
Cook	13.2%	11.6%	32.1%	21.5%
House work	52.0%	59.4%	39.2%	48.0%
Housekeeper	1.0%	1.4%	3.8%	2.2%
Washwoman	4.9%	3.6%	9.4%	3.6%
total domestic work	71.1%	76.1%	84.5%	75.3%

Source: Angola Women's Database

Table I.2: Distribution of Black women per occupation by birth cohort for all Black women admitted 1901-1935 (n=963)

(only the main occupation categories and most populated cohorts are presented)

Occupation	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
Cook	15.3%	12.7%	16.4%	29.7%	26.6%
House work	45.9%	52.3%	54.1%	43.9%	50.5%
Housekeeper	2.4%	1.4%	2.4%	2.4%	1.8%
Washwoman	8.2%	5.5%	6.8%	3.7%	4.6%
total domestic labor	71.8%	71.8%	79.8%	79.7%	83.5%
Farm work	14.1%	16.4%	12.7%	7.3%	9.2%
Laborer	7.1%	5.5%	4.1%	2.8%	2.8%
farm work + laborer	21.2%	21.8%	16.8%	10.2%	11.9%

Source: Angola Women's Database

Table I.3: Percentage of Black women admitted by occupation per crime category (1901-1935)

Occupation	Crimes against persons	Crimes against persons & property	Crimes against property	Crimes against public morality	Other crimes	Total
Cook	19.6%	25.0%	19.8%	50.0%	6.7%	19.8%
House work	46.2%	66.7%	54.9%	30.0%	66.7%	49.7%
Housekeeper	2.7%		1.2%	10.0%		2.2%
Washwoman	4.9%	8.3%	6.1%		13.3%	5.5%
total domestic labor	73.4%	100.0%	82.0%	90.0%	86.7%	77.2%
Housewife	2.7%		1.2%		6.7%	2.2%
Farm work	15.3%		7.3%	10.0%		12.0%
Laborer	5.3%		3.5%			4.4%
No occupation	0.2%		0.3%			0.2%
Nurse			2.0%			0.7%
Other	0.3%		0.3%			0.3%
Restaurant work	0.7%		0.9%			0.7%
School teacher	0.7%		0.3%			0.5%
Seamstress	1.0%		1.5%		6.7%	1.2%
Not available	0.3%		0.9%			0.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Angola Women's Database

APPENDIX J: LITERACY

Table J.1: Number and percentage of female admissions per race by literacy score (1901-1909, 1920-1935)¹⁴⁴³

	Black women				White women			
	Before 1910		After 1920		Before 1910		After 1920	
Not able to read and write	112	56.0%	135	27.7%	6	42.9%	3	4.9%
Able to read or write	2	1.0%						
Able to read and write	84	42.0%	351	72.1%	7	50.0%	58	95.1%
Non available	2	1.0%	1	0.2%	1	7.1%		
Total	200	100%	487	100%	14	100%	61	100%

Source: Angola Women's Database

¹⁴⁴³ The 1910s decade was excluded because of the high number of 'non available'.

APPENDIX K: STATURE AT ADMISSION

Table K.1: Black women's stature (in centimeters) according to age 1901-1935

	Average height	Variation from reference	Median height	Number of observations
All black women 22 years old and over	163.83	Reference	163.85	572
Age group				
22 to 30	163.82	-0.01	163.83	411
31 to 40	164.05	0.22	163.83	124
41 to 50	162.62	-1.21	162.56	31
Over 51	167.85	4.02	167.64	6
Youth				
12	161.61	-2.22	161.61	2
14	161.85	-1.98	161.61	8
15	162.94	-0.89	160.34	10
16	161.56	-2.27	160.66	28
17	163.30	-0.53	163.83	58
18	162.93	-0.90	163.83	88
19	161.70	-2.13	162.56	69
20	163.29	-0.54	162.56	73
21	163.66	-0.17	163.83	59
Total under 21	162.82	-1.01	163.20	395

Source: Angola Women's Database

Table K.2: Black women's adult stature (in centimeters) 1901-1935 according to birth cohort, offense category, occupation prior to incarceration, parish of conviction, and literacy score¹⁴⁴⁴

	Average height	Variation from reference	Median height	Number of observations
Birth cohort				
1840	175.26	11.43	175.26	1
1850	163.20	-0.64	163.20	2
1860	163.41	-0.42	162.56	12
1870	164.39	0.56	164.47	85
1880	163.60	-0.23	163.83	150
1890	163.54	-0.29	163.20	169
1900	164.12	0.29	163.83	137
1910	163.87	0.04	165.10	16
Offense category				
Crimes against persons	163.90	0.07	163.83	371
Crimes against property	163.72	-0.11	163.83	173
Crimes against persons & property	166.64	2.81	167.64	7
Crimes against public morality	159.78	-4.05	160.02	8
Other crimes	164.86	1.03	162.56	13
Occupation				
Cook	164.05	0.22	163.83	116
Farm work	164.50	0.67	165.10	65
House work	163.36	-0.47	163.20	269

¹⁴⁴⁴ All women 21 years old or younger were removed from the sample as they might not have reached their adult size yet. Consequently, the numbers refer to Black women who had finished growing, which eliminates the risk that different cohorts might present heterogeneity in terms of ages and potentially create misleading stature results.

House keeper	161.85	-1.98	162.56	17
House wife	166.12	2.29	167.64	15
Laborer	167.77	3.94	167.64	25
Nurse	165.10	1.27	163.83	3
Other	162.98	-0.85	162.56	3
Restaurant work	166.05	2.22	166.37	6
School teacher	157.96	-5.87	156.85	4
Seamstress	163.96	0.13	160.66	10
Washwoman	163.94	0.11	163.83	36
Parish of conviction				
Caddo	162.70	-1.13	162.56	44
East Baton Rouge	164.20	0.37	163.20	24
Orleans	164.07	0.24	164.47	99
Ouachita	165.28	1.45	163.83	18
Other parish	163.83	0.00	163.83	387
Literacy score (1901-1909, 1920-1935)				
Not able to read and write	164.92	1.09	165.10	162
Able to read and write	163.59	-0.24	163.20	262

Source: Angola Women's Database

Table K.3: Louisiana-born Black women's adult stature (in centimeters) 1901-1935 according to birth cohort¹⁴⁴⁵

	Average height	Variation from reference	Median height	Number of observations
Born in Louisiana	163.97	0.14	163.83	431
Birth cohort				
1840	175.26	11.43	175.26	1
1850	163.20	-0.64	163.20	2
1860	162.84	-0.99	162.56	9
1870	164.84	1.01	164.78	70
1880	163.65	-0.18	163.83	112
1890	163.89	0.06	163.83	118
1900	163.88	0.05	163.83	106
1910	163.49	-0.34	165.10	13

Source: Angola Women's Database

¹⁴⁴⁵ All women 21 years old or younger were removed from the sample as they might not have reached their adult size yet. Consequently, the numbers refer to Black women who had finished growing, which eliminates the risk that different cohorts might present heterogeneity in terms of ages and potentially create misleading stature results.

APPENDIX L: BODY MASS INDEX AT ADMISSION

Table L.1: Adult Black women's BMI values 1901-1935 (n=573) according to age group, birth cohort, occupation, marital status, and offense (main categories)¹⁴⁴⁶

	Mean BMI	Variation from reference	% of women with BMI			Number of observations
			Under 18.5	25 to 29.9	over 30	
Age group						
22-30	23.1	-0.4	9.5%	18.7%	6.6%	411
31-40	24.2	0.7	9.7%	16.9%	15.3%	124
41-50	25.4	1.9	6.5%	19.4%	22.6%	31
51 and over	26.3	2.8		16.7%	33.3%	6
Birth cohort						
1860	28.3	4.8		8.3%	41.7%	12
1870	24.1	0.6	5.9%	17.6%	10.6%	85
1880	23.2	-0.3	8%	21.3%	6.7%	150
1890	22.8	-0.7	11.8%	16%	8.9%	169
1900	23.8	0.3	7.3%	21.2%	8.8%	137
1910	21.9	-1.6	37.5%		18.8%	16
Occupation						
Cook	23.6	0.1	14.7%	19%	11.2%	116
Farm work	23.4	-0.1	12.3%	12.3%	15.4%	65
House work	23.2	-0.3	7.4%	16.7%	8.2%	269
Washwomen	23.6	0.1	2.8%	25%	5.6%	36
Marital status						

¹⁴⁴⁶ Individuals 21 years old or younger were removed from the group because they might have not reached their adult size yet.

Single	23.3	-0.2	8.5%	18.2%	6.7%	165
Married	23.5	0	10.9%	17.7%	10.5%	294
Widowed	23.7	0.2	5.7%	21.8%	9.2%	87
Offense category						
Crimes against persons	23.4	-0.1	11.1%	19.1%	9.7%	371
Crimes against property	23.4	-0.1	5.2%	19.0%	6.9%	174

Source: Angola Women's Database

Table L.2: BMI values 1901-1935 for adult Black women born in Louisiana (n=431) according to age group, and birth cohort¹⁴⁴⁷

	Mean BMI	Variation from reference	% of women with BMI			Number of observations
			Under 18.5	25 to 29.9	over 30	
Total	23.5	0			9.7%	431
Age group						
22-30	23.1	-0.4			6.8%	309
31-40	24.5	1.0			16.3%	92
41-50	24.6	1.1			16.0%	25
51 and over	27.8	4.3			40.0%	5
Birth cohort						
1860	29.5	6.0			44.4%	9
1870	24.1	0.6			11.4%	70
1880	23.2	-0.3			7.1%	112
1890	22.6	-0.9			6.8%	118
1900	24.1	0.6			9.4%	106
1910	22.2	-1.3			23.1%	13

Source: Angola Women's Database

¹⁴⁴⁷ Individuals 21 years old or younger were removed from the group because they might have not reached their adult size yet.

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