

ENGAGING THE TROPE OF REDEPTIVE
SUFFERING: INMATE VOICES IN THE
ANTEBELLUM PRISON DEBATES

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*A*n 1842 American Sunday-School Union pamphlet presented the ideal prisoner. According to the text, Jack Hodges—a convicted murderer serving a twenty-one-year sentence at New York’s Auburn Prison—admitted his guilt, displayed proper penitence, reformed his behavior, and expressed thanks for his prison experience. The Reverend Anson Eddy, who had interviewed Hodges in 1826, regaled readers with stories of Hodges’s modest upbringing and descent into lawlessness. He detailed Hodges’s crime, trial, and death sentence, which was later commuted to life imprisonment. According to Eddy, Hodges encountered upstanding prison staff and a kind chaplain at Auburn. In his solitary cell, the inmate read his Bible, which helped lead him from sin to grace. Not only did Hodges experience personal salvation, the prisoner committed himself to evangelizing others. Eddy’s pamphlet is full of quotations attributed to Hodges, including the inmate’s claim that “I loved [Auburn]. I loved the prison, *for there I first met Jesus.*”¹

While Eddy's pamphlet, like so much antebellum religious literature, focused on the story of an ideal convert, it also featured social commentary on the nation's prisons. Hodges's story, which Eddy presented as a triumph, could easily have been one of unyielding sin and despair. According to the minister, Hodges was first sent to Manhattan's Newgate Prison in 1819 after his sentence was commuted. Eddy had a low opinion of Newgate, which was New York's first effort to punish lawbreakers with incarceration. He wrote of Newgate that "little attention was paid to the habits of education or moral improvement of the inmates. . . . The idea of making [prisons] nurseries of education, means of moral reform, and sanctuaries for moral and religious culture was not entertained even by the Christian community."²

Eddy's assessment was off. In fact, Newgate Prison had been designed, built, and administered in the 1790s by Quaker reformers energized by transatlantic reconsiderations of criminal punishment. These Society members believed that incarceration organized around work, education, and worship would prompt criminals' reformation. The Quakers who ran Newgate, however, never came close to accomplishing that end. The prison was chaotic and soon overcrowded. In 1804 New York officials brought their partnership with the Quaker reformers to an end. Replacing them with state bureaucrats, however, did not improve conditions. When Anson Eddy considered Newgate Prison at the time Hodges entered it in 1819, he beheld a holding cell for criminals and a breeding ground for iniquity. He saw no official efforts to reform criminals' characters. According to Eddy, then, Hodges's transfer to the new prison at Auburn was serendipitous. In his pamphlet, Eddy hailed Auburn's benevolent agent, a warden in today's parlance. He attested that "everything was here arranged for the purpose of cultivating among the prisoners a desire for education, the means of an honourable support in life and the maintenance of correct morals."³

Eddy's pamphlet, with its touching human story grounded in social critique, typifies antebellum pamphlet literature. Stories about sinful inmates and debates about prison discipline were among the many topics that kept scores of new printing presses in business. Reformers of various stripes, as well as state officials, carried out a vigorous paper debate about America's prison experiments centered in Pennsylvania and New York. They argued about prison conditions, inmate labor, solitary confinement, and corporal punishment. The debates often focused on a central question: could convicts be reformed and, if so, how? Many clergymen and reformers replied that inmates could be redeemed and that the prison's central purpose was

to encourage this transformative process. Specifically, many of these men articulated a theology of redemptive suffering as the key element in a reformative prison program. They believed prisons hosted God-ordained afflictions that revealed to inmates the power of sin and prompted reflections on grace and redemption. When reformers contributed to arguments about prison discipline, then, they called for tough—but not torturous—routines in the belief that suffering prompted spiritual and moral regeneration. These clergy and reforming voices came from across the Protestant evangelical community, from revivalist Calvinists to orthodox Quakers. Many of them preferred the prison discipline practiced in New York, a system that practiced congregate labor and allowed limited corporal punishment, to the isolation cells and self-introspection of Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary. Anson Eddy's pamphlet about Hodges supported New York's prison discipline and reflected a pan-Protestant commitment to the connection between the lawbreakers' suffering and redemption.⁴

Former inmates also took up their pens and joined the paper debate. Their pamphlets and books detailed terrible prison conditions and grueling labor in prison workshops. The authors attested to their dread of solitary confinement and the pain of being whipped. While their narratives were grounded in their bodily experience, these texts were more than accounts of physical affliction. The writers also engaged debates about inmate reformation and considered the recurring trope of redemptive suffering. It seems reasonable that inmates who both witnessed and experienced brutal punishments would criticize any theology that encouraged, if not demanded, their suffering. But that is not the case. Instead, ex-inmates engaged the trope of redemptive suffering in order to contrast reasonably harsh punishment with excessively painful disciplinary regimes. They then offered alternative accounts of redemptive suffering that both gave meaning to their dismal incarcerations and criticized some prison staff as un-Christian and un-American. In this way, their voices sounded in unison with many of the Protestant reformers and chaplains.

But the former inmate narratives also differed from reformers and chaplains' rhetoric in significant ways. Unlike Eddy's depiction of Hodges as the perfect prisoner, the former inmate writers rarely attested to a standard conversion narrative that moved from sin and guilt to redemption and grace. Some claimed an experience of prison salvation while others maintained that their faith withered behind bars. Also unlike reformers' depictions of ideal inmates evangelized by kind, state-supported ministers, some works by former inmates criticized prison chaplains. It appears, then, that ex-inmate

writers engaged the trope of redemptive suffering in a variety of ways to criticize particular instantiations of American prison discipline, even those that some Protestant reformers supported. Nevertheless, it seems that their adoption of the redemptive suffering trope—even as they struggled to redefine it—helped keep the idea in circulation. The fact that former inmates, along with reformers, articulated their hopes for a perfect prison with just the right amount of suffering perpetuated the idea in the antebellum public, despite all evidence that the prison system was a social and financial disaster.

Historians have not always sought out prisoners' perspectives. As literary critic Jason Haslam has observed, inmates have had "largely no voice" in prison histories. Or as historian Leslie Patrick has commented, when prisoners are not absent from our histories, they are "abstract." Historians have begun to remedy this situation in a variety of ways. For instance, Rebecca McLennan and Michael Meranze have detailed various forms of inmate resistance to antebellum prison regimes. McLennan cites clandestine communication, workshop sabotage, and prison riots as evidence of inmates' rejection of the commonly held prison ideologies. Meranze uncovered continued acts of inmate intransigence that prompted administrators to respond with increasingly harsh disciplinary tactics. To be sure, the stories uncovered by McLennan and Meranze offer us important insight into inmate reactions to disciplinary innovations and the possibilities for prisoner resistance. At the same time, inmate narratives from the 1830s can show us another form of resistance. In these pages, ex-convicts engaged in the pamphlet wars that papered antebellum America. Their literary output reveals that inmates used multiple mediums—including the tropes that politicians, reformers, and chaplains assumed they were in the singular position to define—as formats for resisting the nation's emerging disciplinary infrastructure.⁵

Interpreting prisoner narratives is a tricky art, but scholars have begun this important work. Literary theorist Ann Fabian, for example, has argued that antebellum narratives written by beggars, convicts, freed or escaped slaves, and former prisoners of war provided "intensely personal" accounts of life on the margins framed primarily in terms of the experience of the body as final authority. A glance through former inmate narratives confirms her claim. The writers detail abuses to their bodies and those imposed on other prisoners. They chronicle the lasting effects of the prison keepers' lashes and cudgels. At the same time, the narratives also display a fascinating engagement with religious and political debates of the day. The authors engage the theological constructions put forth by prison reformers and chaplains.

They raise concerns about the place of brutal punishments in an emerging democracy. They use the theological and civic ideals articulated by the nation's elite as a standard of judgment against the governmental representatives that incarcerated them and, sometimes, the chaplains who ministered to them. As Haslam has observed, prison writers challenge the constructions of the ideal prisoner created by outside observers. In the case of writers commenting on redemptive suffering, it means reinterpreting the figure of the penitent inmate. They transform the trope of redemptive suffering from its central role in prompting criminals' conversion to a platform for resisting excessively punitive regimes and meaningless physical torment. Inmate writers, then, exploit disagreements about redemptive suffering already at play in antebellum print media. Their engagement of the trope, however, also perpetuated the idea that the truly redemptive institution could be achieved.⁶

The inmate narratives of the 1830s, then, supported, albeit with qualifications and criticisms, the existing state of affairs, which continued as prisons in general escaped significant, lasting change for the rest of the nineteenth century. Because readers received the narratives as helpful in their quest for perfecting the prison, we have not seen these works as political. Indeed, in his pioneering work on prison literature, H. Bruce Franklin argues that truly political inmate narratives only emerged in the 1860s. Prior to that, he claims, narratives took the form of the confession or the picaresque, or sometimes a combination of the two. But inmate narratives from New York in the 1830s counter this conclusion. They are not primarily about confessing crimes, although the authors take time to state whether or not they were guilty. Neither are they about regaling the reader with adventure stories from the life of crime. Instead, their writers take up political and religious questions, sometimes reifying complaints made by the religious elite, while at other times leveling a critical eye at the reformers and ministers themselves.⁷

Redemptive Suffering in the Early American Prisons

The trope of redemptive suffering did not emerge immediately from the nation's prison discipline experiments. The Quaker reformers behind New York's first prison, which opened in 1797, did not see the prison as a place of undue suffering. Modeled on Philadelphia's Arch Street Prison, New York's Newgate had common rooms for prisoners to sleep in and collective workshops to labor in during the daytime. The Friends who administered

the prison focused on creating an alternative environment to the city's slums. They provided decent food, clean water, steady work, and reading classes with the belief that criminals would see the benefits of good living and abandon their former ways. The Quakers, however, were wrong. They did not anticipate inmates' responses to losing their freedom.⁸

As Newgate Prison became increasingly overcrowded and chaotic—as well as a financial burden to the public—state officials ended their partnership with the Quakers and replaced them with rising bureaucrats. Several officials appointed to oversee Newgate eventually went on to serve as city councilmen. But these new governmental administrators also failed to make Newgate function smoothly. Searching for ways to make the disciplinary program reformatory, Newgate's agent asked the legislature for funds to hire a chaplain. A series of urban ministers had made occasional visits to Newgate to preach in the chapel, but there was no regular course of religious education at the time. In 1813 the agent hired the Reverend John Stanford, a Baptist minister with Calvinist leanings.⁹

In one of his earliest sermons delivered in Newgate, Stanford described the redemptive quality of prison suffering. Quoting Isaiah 48:10, Stanford intoned: "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." He told the assembled inmates that the prison's "gloomy shades of confinement" and "painful sensations" could—if they would open their hearts—lead them to reconsider their ways and accept God's "balm of consolation" into their "throbbing hearts." Even though Newgate remained chaotic and crowded for the next several years, the chaplain's theology of redemptive suffering remained the spiritual ideal presented by ministers invited by Stanford and affirmed by the state officials who continued to fund Stanford's ministry. It was not until New Yorkers created a new institution upstate, however, that redemptive suffering would find its full institutional flowering.¹⁰

When the Auburn State Prison opened in 1816, it looked a lot like Newgate. Inmates slept in large common rooms. They labored in workshops during the day. Soon enough, Auburn descended into a similar state of disorder. While it is unclear what prompted an experiment with inmate separation, the possibility of solitary confinement was a key turning point for expanding ideas about redemptive suffering. Auburn's agent led the construction of a series of individual cells in the prison's new north wing. On Christmas Day in 1821, he put eighty-five of the "most dangerous and impenitent" offenders into solitary cells. In these spaces measuring

seven feet long, seven feet high, and three and a half feet wide, inmates spent twenty-four hours a day alone and in silence. It was widely reported that guards did not allow prisoners to sit or lie down during the daytime. Short conversations with prison staff or a visiting doctor or minister provided the only exceptions to the solitude.¹¹

While the initial experiment proved disastrous, prison officials tried other variations of solitary confinement. By 1822 Agent Elam Lynds kept inmates in solitary cells at night and brought them together to work during the day. Prisoners shuffled from their daytime and nighttime settings in the lockstep, a single line of inmates connected to each other by their arms and moving in unison by swinging their legs. At all times, prisoners were to be silent. Breaking prison rules brought swift and sure corporal punishment. With Lynds's experiment, the Auburn system of prison discipline was born. It soon would be copied in almost every prison built across the country.¹²

Lynds's experiment seemed to provide three things that eluded earlier experiments: orderly routine, financial solvency, and a potentially reformatory regime. Onlookers sensed that the common labor contributed to reformed habits. They believed the solitude provoked self-reflection and rehabilitation. Beyond the pattern of work and rest, Auburn also boasted the presence of a new, full-time chaplain who provided counsel to inmates and directed religious and educational services. With inmates hard at work and removed from the contaminating influence of a common room full of jabbering criminals, reformation seemed much more likely.¹³

Auburn's next agent, Gershom Powers, presumed that the new disciplinary system prompted inmate reformation. In particular, he argued that the discipline induced the experience of redemptive suffering. Powers looked to chaplains to play a crucial role in this process. He believed that ministers instructed inmates in the humility and degradation proper to their position. In an 1826 pamphlet on prison discipline, he wrote, "[The minister] should . . . dwell emphatically upon [the prisoners'] deep depravity and guilt, in violating the laws of God and their country—convince them of the justice of the sentences . . . and make them feel, pungently, the horrors of their situation." The chaplains would "force [inmates] into reflection, and let self-tormenting guilt harrow up the tortures of accusing conscience, keener than scorpion stings; until the intensity of their suffering subdues their stubborn spirits, and humbles them to a realizing sense of the enormity of their crimes and their obligation to reform." According to Powers, prison officials and chaplains worked in tandem to produce the experience of redemptive

suffering. Powers needed willing Protestant partners. While New York had a history of part-time prison chaplains in Manhattan and in Auburn's early years, the agent needed Christian organizations willing to provide educated ministers and support him in a public campaign to direct the course of America's prison discipline. He found that support in the Reverend Louis Dwight and his Prison Discipline Society of Boston (PDSB).¹⁴

Dwight, a Congregationalist minister anchored in the Calvinist New Divinity movement, founded the PDSB in 1826. After touring American prisons, including decrepit jails across the South, Dwight looked to Auburn Prison as a near-perfect model for the state's goal to punish offenders at no cost and the Christian missionary's hope to evangelize a captive audience. Auburn's productive labor, inmate classification, and strict order served the public well and gave missionaries their best chance to reeducate and reform offenders. Auburn kept inmates working, allowed for religious services, and barred all spirits and tobacco from its grounds. While these numbers must be read with some skepticism, the prison's administrators claimed a recidivism rate of one in twenty compared to one in four at the Manhattan prison. As early as 1827 Dwight claimed success by listing the names of fifty reformed convicts published in the PDSB's annual report. Having followed up with local sheriffs, Dwight's association testified that discharged convict J.P. of Batavia was "altogether reformed," T.H. of Tyrone had his "bad habits cured," and E.B.D. of Sacketts Harbor was "penitent and humble."¹⁵

In the late 1820s, Auburn's agent Powers and the Reverend Dwight integrated Protestant ideas about affliction into the state-run prison discipline in an unprecedented way. The minister appreciated the prison's environment, praising its "unremitted industry" and the prisoners' "entire subordination." The habits of labor, solitary confinement, and the lockstep built order. Dwight even accepted limited use of whipping for disobedient inmates, considering it to be "less severe" than total solitary confinement. In short, he believed that chaplains could fully support the state's project at Auburn. Even the lockstep, which prisoners resisted, and the lash, which both inmates and some of the public abhorred, could be used for the good of society and God's kingdom. Together, Powers and Dwight made redemptive suffering central to reformatory incarceration at Auburn.¹⁶

Things began to change in the 1830s. Chaplains and reformers worried that reformatory incarceration—and the redemptive suffering necessary to achieve it—was in jeopardy. Sing Sing Prison had recently opened its doors and was quickly rumored to feature widespread abusive treatment of inmates. A host of cultural developments threatened to overwhelm popular support

for reformatory incarceration. Reformers and ministers, who considered themselves vital partners in the prison enterprise and key to maintaining proper limits and directions on suffering, increasingly argued that administrators and staff had abandoned the reformatory ideal. They worried that a return to harsh punishments signaled a failure of American democracy and Christianity.

Redemptive Suffering in Peril

Gershom Powers's colleagues across New York did not necessarily share his attitude about prison chaplains and their theology of redemptive suffering. In 1825 New York began construction of the Mount Pleasant State Prison, also known as Sing Sing. Its agent, Elam Lynds, had left Auburn a few years earlier after quarrels about his use of corporal punishments. He had only grown stronger in his convictions about strict prison discipline. According to Lynds, Sing Sing required tough measures to confront the hardened, immigrant criminals within its walls. Having left the slums of the city and the disorder of the recently closed prison in Manhattan, these lawbreakers faced a new order at Sing Sing. Inmates worked silently in the stone quarries during daytime. They moved in a lockstep formation to and from their solitary cells. They ate without the benefit of utensils, alone in their cells. Their food buckets sometimes went unwashed for days in a row. Lynds enforced strict discipline. Even slight violations prompted the lash.¹⁷

Lynds's approach provoked controversy. His strong affiliation with New York's most powerful Democrats made opponents from other parties even more likely to criticize him. For years, prison debates had focused on how best to reform inmates. Which mode of punishment was the more humane way to discipline misbehaving, yet still human subjects? Partisans for Auburn's congregate discipline and Pennsylvania's system of total solitary confinement claimed that their opponents advocated methods unfit for a civilized, Christian society. Lynds's discipline at Sing Sing, however, coincided with a change in this conversation. He questioned criminals' reformatory potential and criticized disciplines that did not make inmates suffer harsh consequences for disobedience. Historian Michael Meranze has traced the resurgence of prison physical violence in the late 1820s and its explosion in the 1830s. He has argued that prison officials were deeply concerned about what they perceived to be inmate intransigence. In Pennsylvania, for instance, where officials refused to use the whip, they turned to devices such

as the iron gag instead. They argued that the gag was a tool for targeting the inmate's will, not a bodily punishment. New Yorkers such as Lynds had no such qualms about punishing the body. Since he questioned whether criminals even had souls, the body was all he had. Lynds argued that programs for inmate reformation were both ill-conceived and an inappropriate use of state funds. With a prominent prison agent that denied inmates' reformatory potential, redemptive suffering's central role in prison discipline was suddenly in doubt.¹⁸

Lynds's successor, Robert Wiltse, shared in this skepticism about inmate reformation. Over the course of the 1830s, Wiltse took Lynds's strict discipline to new heights. He publicly advocated penal theories that questioned the possibility of inmate reformation. He reasoned that prisoners' criminal conduct created a gulf between them and their law-abiding brothers and sisters. Milder means and redemptive words were no match for such debased characters. Severity in word and deed comprised the prison agent's only recourse.¹⁹

Both Lynds and Wiltse defended their tactics by discrediting the theory that incarceration ought to reform criminals. In his 1834 testimony before the New York State legislature, Wiltse decried prison discipline that stressed inmate reformation. Instead, he proposed a system designed for degraded subjects requiring physical pain to bring them into submission. He argued against undue sympathy for the plight of prisoners. Without full public support for the prison staff's authority, strict discipline could never be realized. And Wiltse was clear about who posed the threat. Reformers and ministers, with their misguided sympathy for inmates, threatened to cause a public safety disaster. Tough measures were necessary, Wiltse argued, given the particular criminal population at Sing Sing. These prisoners were of the "most desperate kind." Moral suasion and good influences did nothing to change them. "They can feel nothing but that which comes home to their bodily suffering." Wiltse claimed that obstinate rule-breakers required the "inflicting stripes upon their naked back with the cat." Prisoners lost their freedom and suffered under strict discipline not to prompt conversion, but rather to subdue their evil wills through fear.²⁰

Prisoner Narratives and Redemptive Suffering

As New York's prison discipline grew more severe, a burst of narratives attributed to former inmates appeared. They were a part of the "explosion in printed matter" that helped "recast individual experience" in the second

quarter of the nineteenth century. A look at the narratives published in the 1830s reveals inmates' struggles with the New York prisons and the increasingly harsh punishments they featured. In these publications, former inmates sought to expose the physical cruelties they both witnessed and experienced. They lambasted the staff, accusing them of torture. They upbraided prison administrators for their corruption and cruelty and state officials for their negligence. Facing prison officials who viewed convicts as little more than brute beasts, they argued that felons were redeemable. To make their case, they engaged the trope of redemptive suffering offered to them by ministers and reformers. Even as they appropriated the reformers' language, though, they used it for their own critical ends.²¹

How do we know that these inmate narratives were actually written by inmates or that the sentiments they contain were not strongly shaped by reformers, chaplains, or publishers? Laura Browder has ably documented that such fakes, or "ethnic impersonator biographies," certainly appeared in this period. For instance, white abolitionists penned narratives and attributed them to former slaves. Further, some of the themes articulated in these publications mirror messages by chaplains and reformers. Even more troubling, few of these narratives list publication data beyond the year and the city, making it difficult to compare these works to other titles emerging from the same press. Even so, these writers can be tracked down through other historical documents. More important, their narratives exhibit significant differences from typical accounts by reformers and publishers.²²

Levi S. Burr published the first of the 1830s New York former inmate accounts. He had a different story than most antebellum inmates. Before entering prison, he could be counted among at least the middling class. In 1812 he served as an ensign in one of New York's infantry divisions. By 1813 he had moved up to second lieutenant. According to the Auburn *Evening Star*, by 1822 Burr occupied an office in town and ran a small law practice. Soon after, he started a practice in Washington, DC. Despite these successes, Burr's preprison life was not without trouble. His law practice was interrupted in 1823 when a fellow attorney sued to disbar him. The *Saturday Evening Post* reported in August of that year that Burr was suspended for "conduct unworthy of his profession" and "dishonest practices." He was eventually reinstated and returned to New York. In 1830 he was listed as a working attorney in Manlius, a small town outside Syracuse. But troubles came again. That same year, he was convicted of perjury and sentenced to a three-year term in Sing Sing Prison.²³

After being released sometime in late 1833, Burr tried to regain his social standing and started a campaign to expose Sing Sing's cruel administrators. He petitioned the state legislature in 1834, calling for an investigation of prison staff and claimed that cruelties "derogatory to humanity" were practiced on inmates. Legislators on the state prisons committee failed to heed his call, but Burr already sought a wider audience. He took a full account of his prison critique to the printer. *A Voice from Sing Sing* appeared in late 1833. Reviews of the book began to appear in early 1834.²⁴

Burr's text is divided between an account of his innocence and an exposé of daily life in Sing Sing. Burr described the tools used to beat inmates. Guards used the "cat," a stick with strands of cord, each with sharp wires on the end. They sometimes used a cudgel, a cane applied to beat the head, back, arms, and legs of prisoners. Burr attested that guards beat starving inmates for sharing food with others and flouted legal limits on corporal punishment. According to his narrative, Burr witnessed a prisoner whipped with the cat 133 times on one occasion, so that he was "crying and writhing under the laceration, that tore his skin in pieces from his back." He saw a keeper deliver "a blow across the mouth with his cane, that caused the blood to flow profusely." The government at Sing Sing, Burr wrote, was "a Cat-ocracy and Cudgel-ocracy . . . where there is no eve of pity, no tongue to tell, no heart to feel, or will or power to oppose."²⁵

Burr argued that tortures in Sing Sing were a disservice to the nation. He criticized the agent who directed the keepers to "lacerate the body, spill the blood, and starve the subject." He compared Sing Sing to the French Bastille and called on citizens to rise up against an American version of despotism. He contrasted Sing Sing's discipline with the nation's earlier push for reformatory prison regimes. Burr enumerated Sing Sing's cruelties in contrast to the "benign sentiments of mercy" central to the state's punishment statutes and its citizens' religion. Burr provided a dizzying list of torturous practices to show that the prison fell short of the nation's ideals.²⁶

Burr's book was soon followed by another former inmate account. In 1835 Horace Lane took up his pen to expose prison cruelties. Lane's background stood in sharp contrast to Burr's. As historian Myra Glenn has well documented, Lane came from humble beginnings and was one of many young men in the early republic who sought their fortune at sea. According to his autobiography, before Lane ever received a beating in a New York prison he suffered floggings at the hands of a sea captain and miserable days in

Connecticut's Simsbury mines. In May 1827 he was convicted of grand larceny for stealing several bolts of wool cloth. He served a short term at Auburn. Not long after his release, he was convicted yet again for burglary and theft. In 1830 Lane began his second criminal sentence. This time he landed in Sing Sing.²⁷

In 1835 Lane published *Five Years in State's Prison*, a fictional dialogue between inmates recently released from Auburn and Sing Sing. The characters share their prison experiences. The ex-convict just out of Sing Sing recalls "the severest agony" caused by work in the prison's stone quarry. In the months he spent hauling rocks in wheelbarrows, the Sing Sing prisoner claims that he had "never suffered so much." Worse than the labor, though, were the brutalizing punishments. "The lash was severe," says the Sing Sing inmate. "I got my head cut open" by a keeper. Considering the punishments received by himself and other inmates, the characters states, "I could not help but cry almost all the time, and the more I cried, the more they beat me."²⁸

Two years later, Lane published another account of his time in Auburn and Sing Sing. The title of his pamphlet—*The Question: What Did You Do to Get There? Answered, Or, Five Years in State's Prison, Revised*—implies that Lane's first publication prompted some readers to question his claims on account of his criminal past. This later book also recited a series of tortures experienced at Sing Sing. The prison's basic routines, Lane argued, were humiliating. He claimed that a line of inmates doing the lockstep looked from a distance like "a long reptile crawling out of a dead horse." The punishments for breaking rules were even worse. Lane claimed he was beaten with the cudgel so that blood trickled down his face. He wrote of keepers who whipped inmates with forty or fifty lashes with the cat. Lane observed that his bitter days ended in tears, while others inmates allowed their spirits to be hardened, even to the point of taking their own lives. Evoking the way his readers might associate torture with the Orient, Lane called Sing Sing the "domain of the American Arabs."²⁹

In 1839 a third narrative from a former Sing Sing inmate appeared. Like Burr, James Brice had occupied a higher social position prior to his incarceration. He worked as a lawyer and lived somewhere around Albany. According to his memoirs, Brice's alleged crime resulted from a dispute over hunting and logging rights in the Manor of Rensselaerwyck, an old Dutch manor. Court documents, however, attest to an inheritance dispute in which Brice was indicted for perjury. In March 1834 Brice was sentenced to four years in Sing Sing.³⁰

As with Burr's and Lane's narratives, Brice emphasized the physical cruelties he and other inmates experienced at Sing Sing. He described months-long periods when prisoners received so little food they felt close to starvation. He told of a work-related injury that left one arm nearly crippled. His focus, however, was the prominent role of flogging in Sing Sing's discipline. In a direct address to the reader, Brice wrote: "If you could but once witness a state prison flogging. The victim is stripped naked and beaten with a cruel instrument of torture called a cat, from neck to his heels, until as raw as a piece of beef." He told of floggings he witnessed in which inmates' backs were so mangled and infected that "they smelled of putrification." Brice reported his own flogging on two occasions. In the second incident, the keeper also pressed a loaded pistol against Brice's chest and threatened to fire.³¹

While it is hardly surprising that narratives by former inmates would dwell on physical experiences of torture, the texts' engagement with the trope of redemptive suffering is somewhat unexpected. Each of the narratives attributed to a former Sing Sing inmate directly addressed the purpose of prisoner suffering. As these writers recalled prison administrators who questioned convicts' reformatory potential, they argued that redemptive suffering was the inmate's only hope. They also claimed that prisons that prompted redemptive suffering were better suited to America's founding political vision. Burr, for instance, argued that laws in favor of humane punishment reflected the religious sentiments of the population. Through the law and the prisons, the people "follow [the convict] with a Christian's mercy, call upon him to repent his transgressions, forsake the evil, and be forgiven." Prison presented law-breakers with a message about their crimes. While difficult, prison should be nothing like the "horrid place" Sing Sing was under Agent Lynds.³²

Horace Lane also made a case for redemptive suffering. He claimed that his Sing Sing conversion experience convinced him that reformation was the institution's only acceptable goal. "Affliction," he wrote, brought inmates "to the feet of Jesus." Suffering "improve[d] the soul." Drawing a comparison to the biblical character Manasseh, Lane argued that inmates needed to be taken into exile before experiencing God's pardon and blessings of pain. Even so, Lane resisted Lynds's skepticism of inmate reformation. Though Lynds denied the possibility, Burr and Lane argued that God used the right amount of prison suffering for a greater end. Sing Sing, however, went too far. It destroyed many convicts, hardening them in their iniquity. These former inmate writers, then, employed the trope of redemptive suffering to resist prison regimes.³³

Lane's later narrative made an even stronger argument for redemptive suffering, in contrast to the meaningless torture he experienced at Sing Sing. In his account of his full life story, Lane frequently claimed that God brought afflictions to those whom He longed to save. He wrote that God had waited to "lay his chastening hand" upon him and that he was only "blessed" by judgments later in life. He quoted Hebrews 12:11 that chastening was "grievous" in the moment, but was later realized to yield "peaceable fruits of righteousness." Lane contrasted his understanding of biblical forms of redemptive suffering with Sing Sing's tortures. He compared the prison's guards to the biblical Demas, the missionary who abandoned the apostle Paul out of "love for the present world." Like Demas, the cruel guards pursued their own destructive interests rather than support the prison's redemptive aims.³⁴

James Brice also appears to have taken the message of redemptive suffering to heart. He acknowledged that Sing Sing's purpose is to "punish our convicts with the strong arm of the law." The public had to have a way to address those who "willfully violate [the nation's laws]." But Sing Sing punished too harshly. "What is the object of punishment?" Brice wonders. "Surely it is to reform the offender." By missing the mark, Sing Sing betrayed the nation's character. Brice asks his readers if such institutions can be "permitted in a Christian land, where the gospel is sounded."³⁵

In the face of some of the worst violence against prisoners in the antebellum North, these narratives show that inmates engaged the trope of redemptive suffering both to make meaning of their afflictions and to criticize disciplinary regimes. To some extent, the ex-convicts made claims similar to the chaplains who had articulated this theology as New York's institutions emerged. The former inmates' statements echoed those of Agent Powers and the Reverend Louis Dwight. But with the advent of Lynds's discipline at Sing Sing—the beginning of a penal philosophy that underplayed, if not derided, criminal reformation—inmates defended the notion that their sufferings must have a purpose. In the face of a changing cultural climate and administrations that scoffed at reformation, some inmates and Protestant reformers rallied behind the reformatory suffering in an effort to align prison discipline with traditions of Protestant piety and aspirations for the nation's millennial blessedness.

But there were also important differences. While the Sing Sing narratives focused on cruel prison guards and agents, the one account we have from Auburn Prison in this period targets the chaplain for particular criticism and disdain. An anonymous book, *A Peep Into the State Prison at Auburn*, appeared

in 1839. The author is listed only as “One Who Knows.” The title page reads that the booklet was produced in Auburn. There were no book publishers in the town at the time, but there were several printers and newspapers. Because the narrative reprints several letters to the editor from the *Cayuga Patriot*, it is possible that someone related to the paper assisted in the book’s publication.³⁶

The narrative catalogs the punishments received within Auburn’s “terrible place of torture.” The writer claimed to have served a sentence that ended in the spring of 1838. His text details inmates flogged for not working fast enough and cases in which an inmate died just days after receiving dozens of stripes. “Was not this man murdered?” the author asks. The ex-prisoner also described floggings of the mentally ill and of female offenders. The narrative abounds with comparisons intended to shock readers with awful images of the prison’s dismal reality. It is “but a Managerie [*sic*] for human tame beasts,” with staff as cruel as the “negro drivers of the South.” According to the author, punishment in Auburn was worse than anything practiced in “savage countries” and the tyrannous Napoleon enacted a more noble discipline than America’s prison agents could manage.³⁷

The author saved his harshest criticism, however, for Auburn’s chaplain, the Reverend B. C. Smith. According to the inmate, the minister visited infrequently because he was taken up with “worldly affairs.” Even worse, the chaplain contributed to Auburn’s menacing environment. The author claimed that the chaplain showed disregard for inmates’ bodies, particularly the sick, dying, and dead. The minister sometimes neglected the prison hospital for five or six weeks at a time. Convinced of the truth of his Protestant faith, the chaplain denied a dying Roman Catholic prisoner visitation by a priest. According to the writer, Smith often failed to contact inmates’ families as death approached. As a result, prison staff folded up unclaimed corpses and stuffed them into whiskey barrels or old wooden boxes. The deceased had no Christian burial. Some were given over for dissection to local doctors. The author assumed that such injustices occurred because the people of “this enlightened, this Christian State, either do not know it, or . . . their eyes are blinded to the real state of the case.”³⁸

This anonymous author—like Burr, Lane, and Brice—defended the central role of redemptive suffering in prison disciplines designed for inmate reform. In this way, their personal narratives echoed claims made by Protestant ministers and reformers. But if we consider Ansel Eddy’s account of Jack Hodges, we can also see substantial differences. The anonymous narrative about

Auburn is the most dramatic example. In this text, the writer identifies the chaplain—who was supported, ironically, by Louis Dwight’s prison discipline society—as one of the prison workers who undermined the rehabilitative climate and contributed to prisoner mistreatment. While the other accounts do not go so far, none of them attests to the classic redemptive experience at the heart of reformers’ pamphlet literature.³⁹

Horace Lane’s text is the most intriguing example. While much of Lane’s account details his terrible years at Sing Sing, he also wrote about his earlier term at Auburn. According to Lane, Auburn had a mild discipline at the time he was incarcerated there. The keepers rarely whipped inmates. Lane counted himself as one among many inmates who respected the prison’s agent, Gershom Powers. Even so, he failed to experience redemption. He served his time at a moment that many reformers viewed to be the high mark in New York’s prison history. He claimed to have read the Bible through seven times. He felt regret and experienced what he called a “valley of humiliation.” But he was not redeemed. “There was something lacking,” he wrote a year later in his autobiography. “I did not believe I was a Christian.” Despite his support for the theology of redemptive suffering, Lane was no ideal penitent. None of the extant narratives by former inmates includes a classic redemption story.⁴⁰

Reading Inmate Narratives

How were these inmate narratives received? Did anyone read these former prisoners’ stories? We know that Burr appeared before the state legislature in 1834. Brice went on to publish again. Although his later book was a chronicle of his father’s Indian captivity during the Revolutionary War, Brice included an affidavit in which New York governor John Young pardoned him. Mainstream newspapers and religious periodicals reviewed some of the former inmate publications. These stories, then, were circulated. And while the prisoners used their texts in an effort to redefine and reinterpret redemptive suffering, it seems that their readership understood these works—like texts by Protestant reformers—as support for the ongoing search for the perfectly redemptive prison.⁴¹

The *Auburn Journal*, *Albany Microscope*, and *Albany Journal* featured early reviews of Burr’s book. These articles were then picked up by the *Boston Investigator* and the *Daily National Intelligencer* out of Washington, DC. The reviewers expressed shock—and not a little bit of fascination—at Burr’s

accounts of bodily cruelty at Sing Sing. Like the readers titillated by accounts of human misery so ably chronicled by Karen Halttunen, these reviewers focused on instruments used to harm the body, the distressed feelings prompted by starvation, and flesh lacerated by whips. Like the narratives' authors, the reviewers compared Sing Sing to a list of specters—Southern slavery, the Spanish Inquisition, and the French Bastille—intended to horrify any Northerner of good feeling.⁴²

Reviewers of the anonymous *A Peep Into the State Prison* also focused on the narrative's accounts of physical cruelty. The reviewer for a Universalist periodical referred to Auburn as a "hell upon earth" in which "tyrannical and brutal keepers" practiced "abominable cruelties." Referring to coverage of the book in the *Cayuga Patriot*, the writer offered his opinion that the narrative was credible. Like the reviewers of Burr's book, the writer compared Auburn to the Bastille in an effort to shock his republican readers.⁴³

Reviewers of both books argued that the inmates' accounts ought to prompt citizens in their unceasing effort to achieve the perfect—meaning republican, Christian, and redemptive—prison. A reviewer for *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* argued that the American people intended prisons for "reformation and not for abuse" and that the citizens of "this enlightened State" must work for prisons with "wholesome food, comfortable clothing" and an environment in which the "spirit of confidence in God and man . . . is generated in the convict's bosom." Reviewers of Burr's text called for "close surveillance" of prison officers lest "the purest models of prisons ever adopted" be like the "abhorred inquisition." The *Albany Microscope* reviewer sounded his call for perfect prisons in the clearest terms: "It is scarcely to be credited such barbarous conduct is permitted in America—in republican, merciful America—and in the very midst of charity, benevolence, religion, temperance, and freedom!!!" If Karen Halttunen has shown us how graphic antebellum memoirs functioned as a "pornography of pain," they also seem to have perpetuated the pursuit of the perfect prison.⁴⁴

While Burr's narrative and the anonymous book on Auburn Prison prompted at least some conversation, it is less clear if Lane and Brice's texts had a similar effect. According to Myra Glenn, Lane boasted of his prison memoir's sales in his later-published autobiography. Glenn, however, is skeptical after finding no reviews of his book in antebellum periodicals. Something, though, prompted him to keep publishing specifically on his prison experience. His 1836 book, *The Question*, was clearly written as an answer to those who challenged his claims based on his status as a felon.

He may not have sold the 11,000 copies he later claimed, but something kept him putting his story out into public view. James Brice also continued to publish and tried to keep the story of his prison experience in circulation. Governor John Young pardoned him in 1840 and returned to him all the civil rights he surrendered upon being found guilty. It was not enough for Brice. Along with publishing more about his prison experience, he also successfully sued for his right to serve as a witness in a New York court.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Antebellum inmates mounted a variety of protests against the new nation's disciplinary regimes. They devised elaborate systems for clandestine communication. They destroyed tools and set fire to workshops. They instigated riots and hatched daring escape plots. They also engaged in the paper debate about the aims of criminal justice and the workings of reformatory incarceration. Cognizant of the theology that animated the Auburn system—the discipline copied almost exclusively in American prisons—the inmates engaged the trope of redemptive suffering in their efforts to criticize the institutions and officials who confined them. Unlike Protestant reformers, they sometimes disparaged prison chaplains. In this way, they used the language of redemptive suffering not only to condemn state and prison officials, but also to assess the reformers and ministers who had articulated the language of redemptive suffering in the first place.

These texts stand among many antebellum accounts that featured a social critique grounded in personal stories of gruesome bodily violence. Like narratives intended to expose audiences to the horrors of slavery, intemperance, domestic violence, and prostitution, the former inmate accounts pointed out that the lawful suffering of many of America's inhabitants stood in stark contrast to the nation's ideals and religious character. But even as these writers attempted to take hold of the trope of redemptive suffering and use it toward their own ends, it seems that readers—or at least reviewers—understood them as clarion calls to reform rather than radical reconsiderations of or calls to abolish altogether the prison as an American institution. While Americans could imagine a world without slavery or alcohol, they could think of no other way to deal with criminal offenders than to imprison them. My small sample of former inmate writing suggests that prisoners,

too, had little capacity for calling the institution itself into question. To be sure, my sample is somewhat skewed in the direction of the upper classes. We know that Burr and Brice were not representative inmates. Perhaps we should look at other forms of resistance in this period—workshop sabotage, arsons, and escapes—to balance out the less radical themes in the narratives. Even so, while the writers did not envision the prison's end, they did want change. They wanted to stop torture. They argued that prisons ought to offer criminals a second chance. But their deployment of the redemptive suffering trope—even as a mode of critique—contributed to a status quo of severe prison disciplines punctuated periodically by bursts of reform with little lasting effect.⁴⁶

These texts from the 1830s appeared and were circulated during the New York prisons' darkest hour. They made up part of a conversation that eventually prompted reform. Whig candidate and antislavery advocate William Seward won the New York governor's race and took office in 1838. In early 1839 he delivered a scathing report on New York's penal institutions. He detailed abuses and instituted a series of reforms. He fired old officials and named new ones sympathetic to his cause. He placed strict limits on the lash. He reinstated Sabbath Schools and funded prison libraries. During his administration, prison agents allowed inmates to write and receive letters from their families, have visits with friends and relatives, and request pardons. Seward, of course, backed a series of progressive causes from antislavery to antigallows reforms. I am not trying to claim that the governor read these inmate narratives. But Seward certainly won office in a moment that progressive reforms received significant popular approval. His prison reforms addressed the issues presented by writers as far ranging as reformer Louis Dwight and ex-convict Horace Lane.⁴⁷

But Seward's reforms lasted only as long as his two short terms in office. By the mid-1840s, New York's prisons were once again the sites of cruel punishments. No lasting changes had resulted. The inmate narratives of the 1830s, then, perpetuated the existing state of affairs, a cycle in which prisons escaped significant, lasting change. They had offered long reflections on the experience of bodily suffering and questioned the political and religious character of any nation of that countenanced such abuses. They criticized some reformers and ministers who advocated redemptive suffering, trying to use this theological construct in new ways that made meaning of their suffering and placed new restrictions on prison practice. While they might not have called for the prison's abolition, they articulated positions on criminal justice

and church-state partnerships at a moment when both were hotly debated in the antebellum public sphere. These were no confessional stories or tales of adventure. They were political and religious manifestos at odds with the prison practices of the day.

NOTES

1. Ansel D. Eddy, *Black Jacob: A Monument of Grace; The Life of Jacob Hodges, an African Negro Who Died in Canandaigua, N.Y., February 1842* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1842), 44.
2. Ibid., 22–24. The standard history of the New York prisons is W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796–1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965). Many publications by reformers and ministers presented idealized images of New York's inmates. See John Stanford, *The Brand Plucked Out of the Fire* (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1821); *Sword of Justice, Wielded by Mercy: A Dialogue Between the Inspectors of the State Prison, in New-York, and a Convict on the Day of His Liberation* (New York: Office of the Gospel Herald, 1822); John Stanford, *A True Account of the Confessions, and Contra Confessions of John Johnson, Who Was Executed on Friday, the Second of April, For the Murder of James Murray* (New-York: C. Brown and R. Tyrell, 1824); John Luckey, *Prison Sketches* (New York: Carleton and Phillips, 1853); John Luckey, *Life in Sing Sing State Prison, as Seen in a Twelve Year's Chaplaincy* (New York: N. Tibbals and Co., 1860). Reformers and ministers also included stories of ideal inmates in religious periodicals and annual reports to mission agencies, reform societies, and state legislatures. Like their colonial-era forebears, they also published pieces on unrepentant inmates. For the background on antebellum tracts and other religious literature, see Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 22–33.
3. Eddy, *Black Jacob*, 22–24.
4. A sample of the prison discipline pamphlets includes Thomas Eddy, *An Account of the State-Prison or Penitentiary House in the City of New York by One of the Inspectors of the Prison* (New York: Isaac Collins, 1801); Gershom Powers, *A Brief Account of the Construction, Management, and Discipline of the New-York State Prison at Auburn* (Auburn, NY: U. F. Doubleday, 1826); Roberts Vaux, *Letter on the Penitentiary System of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1827); Charles Bulfinch, *Report of Charles Bulfinch on the Subject of Penitentiaries* (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1827); John Sergeant, *Observations and Reflections on the Designs and Effects of Punishment* (Philadelphia, 1828); Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville, *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and Its Application in France* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1833); *Letters of the Comparative Merits of the Pennsylvania and New York Systems of Penitentiary Discipline, by A Massachusetts Man* (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1836); Frederick R. Packard, *A Vindication of the Separate System of Prison Discipline from the Misrepresentations of the North American Review, July 1839* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1839). Debates about the theological meaning and purpose of pain had occupied American clerics for some time. Historians such as Elaine Forman Crane have noted that the eighteenth century ushered in debates that complicated long-held assumptions about God's providential use of pain. Elizabeth B. Clark has also observed how the specter of slavery shaped debates about pain in the early

- nineteenth century. See Crane, "'I Have Suffer'd Much Today': The Defining Force of Pain in Early America," in *Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Personal Identity in Early America*, ed. Ronald Hoffman, Mechal Sobel, and Fredrika J. Teute (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 370–403; Clark, "'The Sacred Rights of the Weak': Pain, Sympathy and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995): 463–93. By including everyone from the Quakers Thomas Eddy and Isaac Hopper to Calvinist Louis Dwight and Methodist John Luckey, I go against the historiography of prisons specifically and reform affiliations generally. These Protestants, committed to both personal and social transformation, advocated remarkably similar prison disciplines. And on their point of most significant disagreement, corporal punishment, a close look brings the parties closer together than most historians have allowed. For instance, Quakers who abhorred whipping had few qualms about other bodily restrictions such as gagging and Calvinists who advocated whipping called for strict limitations and oversight of the practice. See Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction: Prisons and Religion in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4. Beyond prison historiography, my thesis about shared Protestant approaches to transforming marginal citizens is somewhat at odds with theses such as Greven's, notions of Protestant difference about practices such as child-rearing. See Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Knopf, 1977). For more on the difference between the Pennsylvania and New York disciplines, see David J. Rothman, "Perfecting the Prison: United States, 1789–1865," in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, ed. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 100–116.
5. Jason W. Haslam, *Fitting Sentences: Identity in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Prison Narratives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 3; Leslie Patrick [Stamp], "Prisoners' Presence and Perspectives: Introduction and Statement of Significance," in *Eastern State Penitentiary: Historic Structures Report*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1994), 22; Rebecca M. McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776–1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–2; Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760–1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 311–13. On the question of criminal narratives in particular, the scholarship on the seventeenth and eighteenth century is much richer than for the nineteenth. See Philip Rawlings, *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices: Criminal Biographies of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Daniel E. Williams, *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1993).
 6. Ann Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3; Haslam, *Fitting Sentences*, 3–4. I make a distinction between narratives written by prisoners and execution narratives that were wildly popular through the 1830s and 1840s. While there are some overlapping concerns, namely how some citizens found themselves committing crime and which criminals experienced repentance, the issues raised by these two types of narratives are sufficiently different. For a fine example of how execution narratives functioned in the early republic, see Alan Taylor, "'The Unhappy Stephen Arnold': An Episode of Murder and Penitence in the Early Republic," in *Through a Glass Darkly*, ed. Hoffman, Sobel, and Teute, 96–121.
 7. H. Bruce Franklin, *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 133.

8. Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, chap. 1. Much of my brief review on ministers and redemptive suffering comes from chapters 1–4 of this title.
9. *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York*, 35th sess., January 1812 (Albany: n.p., 1812), 118; Charles George Sommers, *Memoir of the Rev. John Stanford, D.D., Late Chaplain to the Humane and Criminal Institutions in the City of New-York* (New-York: Swords, Stanford, and Co., 1835), 112.
10. John Stanford, State Prison Volume, John Stanford Papers, New-York Historical Society Library, New York. For more on Stanford's career, see Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, chap. 2. I have found only one narrative by a former inmate from Newgate: *Inside-Out; or, An Interior View of the New-York State Prison; Together With Biographical Sketches of the Lives of Several of the Convicts*. The anonymous book appeared in 1823. The title was eventually attributed to William A. Coffey, a young man from a respectable family. The events leading to his crime are unclear, but he was convicted of forgery in 1819 and served a sentence in Newgate. "William A. Coffey's Case," *The New-York City-Hall Recorder* 4, no. 4 (April 1819): 52. His narrative was reviewed—and the authorship debated—in the *National Advocate*, the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, and the *New-York Evening Post*. See George A. Thompson Jr., "Counterfeiter's Jargon of the 1820s," *American Speech* 71, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 335. Reviewers of Coffey's book expected that it would make "a great deal of noise" and "attract much attention." See "Inside-Out," *Maryland Gazette and Political Intelligencer* 78, no. 32 (August 7, 1823): 1.
11. Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 67; D. Morris Kurtz, *Auburn, N.Y.: Its Facilities and Resources* (Auburn, NY: Kurtz Publishing, 1884), 44–45.
12. Kurtz, *Auburn, N.Y.*, 44–45.
13. W. David Lewis argued that Lynds resisted the presence of educational and religious services early on in his career at Auburn. While I certainly agree that Lynds eventually resisted such practices vehemently, I can find no evidence that he did so in the institution's earliest years. See Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 101.
14. Powers, *Brief Account of the Construction, Management, and Discipline*, 18–19, 35. For more on Powers's ideas about prison chaplains, see Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, chap. 3.
15. Prison Discipline Society of Boston (hereafter PDSB), "Second Annual Report" (1827), in *Reports of the Prison Discipline Society of Boston, The Twenty-nine Annual Reports of the Board of Managers, 1826–1854 with a Memoir of Louis Dwight* (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1855; reprint, Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1972), 1:113, 118–19. For more on Dwight's career as a reformer, see Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, chap. 3.
16. PDSB, "Second Annual Report," 37, 19, 18.
17. Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 106.
18. Rothman, "Perfecting the Prison," 106–7; Michael Meranze, "A Criminal Is Being Beaten: The Politics of Punishment and the History of the Body," in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 2000), 320; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 107.
19. Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 149–55.
20. Robert Wiltse, "Report," in *Documents of the Senate of the State of New York*, 57th sess., vol. 2, no. 92 (Albany, NY: E. Crosswell, 1834), 38–44; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 121–23.
21. David Hochfelder, "The Communications Revolution and Popular Culture," in *A Companion to 19th-Century America*, ed. William L. Barney (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 307, 314.

22. See Browder, *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 1–12. Only one of the authors, Horace Lane, left complete publishing information. He published both his prison books with Luther Pratt and Sons, an outfit in upstate New York that published everything from local newspapers to defenses of Freemasonry, to eulogies for George Washington. In other words, it seems to have been a press without a strong ideological identity.
23. Colonel William H. Powell, *List of Officers of the Army of the United States from 1779 to 1900* (New York: L. R. Hamersly and Co., 1900), 64, 86, 128; James Croggon, "Square Number 491, Its Development, Early During the Last Century," [Auburn] *Evening Star*, December 30, 1906, p. 1; William Cranch, *Reports of Cases Civil and Criminal: United States Circuit Court of the District of Columbia from 1801 to 1841 in Six Volumes* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1852), 2:381–401; "Weekly Compendium," *Saturday Evening Post* 2, no. 33 (August 16, 1823): 2; Edwin Williams, *New York Annual Register for the Year of Our Lord 1830* (New York: J. Leavitt, 1830), 273.
24. "Report of the Committee on State Prisons on the Petition of Levi S. Burr," in *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York*, vol. 57, February 1834 (Albany: n.p., 1834), 11; Levi S. Burr, *A Voice from Sing-Sing. Giving a General Description of the State Prison. A Short and Comprehensive Geological History of the Quality of the Stone of the Quarries; and a Synopsis of the Horrid Treatment of the Convicts in that Prison* (Albany: s.n., 1833).
25. Burr, *A Voice from Sing-Sing*, preface, 16–18, 20, 23, 29; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 113–114.
26. Burr, *A Voice from Sing Sing*, 15, 4, preface; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 114. Ann Fabian has noted the way antebellum narrators made continual references to bodily experience. See Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth*, 64.
27. For a wonderful exploration of Lane's life, literary output, and antebellum gender norms, see Myra C. Glenn, "Troubled Manhood in the Early Republic: The Life and Autobiography of Sailor Horace Lane," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 59–93.
28. Horace Lane, *Five Years in State Prison; or Interesting Truths, Showing the Manner of Discipline in the State Prison at Sing Sing and Auburn, Exhibiting the Great Contrast between the Two Institutions, in the Treatment of the Unhappy Inmates; Represented in a Dialogue between Sing Sing and Auburn* (New York: Luther Pratt and Sons, 1825), 16, 12, 9; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 114.
29. Horace Lane, *The Question: What Did You Do to Get There? Answered; Or, Five Years in State's Prison Revised* (New-York, n.p., 1836), 27–29, 24.
30. James R. Brice, *Secrets of the Mount-Pleasant State Prison, Revealed and Exposed* (s.n.), 1839. For an account of Brice's crime and trial, see Oliver L. Barbour, *Reports of Cases in Law and Equity in the Supreme Court of the State of New-York*, vol. 5 (Albany, NY: Gould, Banks and Gould, 1850), 533–35.
31. Brice, *Secrets of the Mount-Pleasant State Prison*, 55, 60, 52, 69, 70.
32. Burr, *A Voice from Sing-Sing*, 14; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 117.
33. Lane, *Five Years in State's Prison*, 19–20, 23; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 117.
34. Lane, *The Question*, 8, 24, 30.
35. Brice, *Secrets of the Mount-Pleasant State Prison*, 72; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 118.
36. *A Peep Into the State Prison at Auburn, NY, with an Appendix, by One Who Knows* (Auburn, NY: s.n., 1839). Thanks to Lauren Chyle at the Cayuga Museum of History and Art for her assistance tracking down Auburn printers.
37. *A Peep into the State Prison at Auburn*, 6, 5, 27, 30, 41, 33, 48, 50, 36; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 127–128.

38. *A Peep into the State Prison at Auburn*, 53–54, 63–65, 44; Graber, *Furnace of Affliction*, 128.
39. Brice, especially, spoke well of Sing Sing chaplains Jonathan Dickerson and Edwin Mead. Brice, *Secrets of the Mount-Pleasant State Prison*, 11.
40. Lane, *Five Years in State's Prison*, 1–15, 18; Horace Lane, *The Wandering Boy, Careless Sailor, and Result of Inconsideration: A True Narrative* (Skaneateles, NY: L. A. Pratt, 1839), 191–92.
41. Scholars have endlessly debated the dynamics of antebellum reading. Clearly, the authors of inmate narratives capitalized on recent technological innovations and the lower costs of books, among other things, to tell their story. At the same time, historian Ronald J. Zboray warns us not to forget other qualities of printing and reading in this period, namely that most books were still too expensive for workers to afford. See Zboray, "Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation," in *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 180–200.
42. "Voice from Sing Sing," *Boston Investigator*, January 3, 1834, issue 41; "A Voice from Sing Sing," *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 14, 1834, issue 6581.
43. "A Peep Into the State Prison at Auburn," pt. 1, *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 10, no. 7 (February 15, 1839): 55; "A Peep Into the State Prison at Auburn," pt. 2, *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 10, no. 11 (March 15, 1839): 86.
44. "A Peep Into the State Prison at Auburn" (February 15, 1839), 55; "Voice from Sing Sing" (*Daily National Intelligencer*); "Voice from Sing Sing" (*Boston Investigator*); Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (April 1995): 303–34.
45. Myra Glenn argues that there is no way that Lane could have sold the 11,000 copies he claimed. She could find no evidence of the book being reviewed in antebellum periodicals. I could find no evidence either. See Glenn, "Troubled Manhood," 59–60. James R. Brice, *A History of the Revolutionary War: Captivity of John and Robert Brice* (Albany, NY: n.p., 1851; reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, 1978); "The Supreme Court of New York, May Term, 1851," *The Monthly Law Reporter* 4, no. 8 (December 1851): 437.
46. For more on how Americans and Europeans quickly began to see the prison as their primary approach to criminals, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 232. Unfortunately, the scholarship on class difference among prisoners is fairly thin, with the exception of work specifically on criminals who received the death penalty. See Gabriele Gottlieb, "Class and Capital Punishment in Early Urban North America," in *Class Matters: Early North America and the Atlantic World*, ed. Simon Middleton and Billy G. Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 185–97.
47. PDSB, "Fourteenth Annual Report" (1839), in *Reports of Prison Discipline Society of Boston*, 3:339–42; Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 210; Luckey, *Life in Sing Sing State Prison*, 172–89, 256–72; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 578–79. Seward's social progressivism was not necessarily fostered by his religious affiliation. His wife was a devout Episcopalian and Seward followed her into church membership. Even so, he commented in his autobiography that he saw little difference between the Protestant "sects." See William Henry Seward and Frederick William Seward, *William H. Seward; an Autobiography from 1801 to 1834; With a Memoir of His Life, and Selections from His Letters* (New York: Derby and Miller, 1891), 53–54.