

**“SHE KEEPS THE PLACE IN CONTINUAL
EXCITEMENT:” FEMALE INMATES’
REACTIONS TO INCARCERATION IN
ANTEBELLUM PENNSYLVANIA’S PRISONS**

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*W*estern State Penitentiary, located in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, received its first inmate on July 31, 1826. Less than a year later, on March 29, 1827, an inmate, Hiram Lindsay, escaped from its confines. It was later discovered that Lindsay was aided by “the coloured woman” who from “feelings of humanity, on the part of her Keeper was not confined that night to her cell.”¹ Only one woman was in the prison at the time: Maria Penrose, twenty-one, born in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, and described as having a yellow complexion with black hair and eyes, arrived at the Penitentiary on September 6, 1826, to serve a sentence of two years for larceny committed in Bedford County. She would serve a little over one year and be discharged on December 1, 1827.² Penrose was a typical female convict in Western State Penitentiary: she was young, African American, born in Pennsylvania, and convicted of larceny. While Penrose may have only been an accomplice in Lindsay’s act of overt resistance to the prison system, her role exemplifies that female

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inmates were not always passive victims of the penal institutions but found ways to react to and challenge imprisonment. Female inmates found numerous ways to make their presence known in Pennsylvania's state and county prisons, ranging from subtle, personal acts to hold onto their identity, to using privileges obtained from prison staff to make their prison sentences easier, to blatant attempts at physical resistance to the oppressive prison system.

Penrose had used the sympathy of prison guards and the privilege of being able to roam the cell blocks to aid another inmate in thwarting prison security. Women were incarcerated in Pennsylvania's penitentiaries alongside men, yet they constituted a small percentage of the overall prison population. As a result, prison guards often neglected the needs of this small inmate population, treated them differently, and were inconsistent in their protocols toward female prisoners. This differential treatment reflected the guards' discomfort with having women in the institution. Especially in the early years of the penitentiaries' existence, female inmates were often given extra privileges, perhaps as a way to assuage the guilt of having them housed with male prisoners.³

Some female inmates, like Penrose, used the sympathetic treatment of the guards to their advantage. Her involvement in the escape may not be deemed a form of direct resistance, but she clearly used what privileges she had as the sole female inmate to help Lindsay regain his freedom, a goal perhaps she felt she could not attain herself. Because she was given privileges, it is possible that the conditions of her incarceration were not as bad as those of other inmates. In a place where anonymity and isolation were supposedly the norm, Penrose seemed to have had the freedom to move about the prison as she wished. While we do not know if she used her privileges to help him out of compassion or if her plan was a more general act to hinder penitentiary discipline, her actions indicate that when prisoners had an opportunity to work against their punishers they used it.⁴

Imprisoned women in Pennsylvania's state and county prisons, such as Penrose, resisted becoming lost in the prison systems in numerous ways. Sometimes women's actions were simply forms of protest against a coercive system. These protestations could be subtle, such as writing secret letters or telling their stories of incarceration to the outside world, which can be seen as personal forms of reaction against incarceration—attempts to hold on to their humanity and identity. Other women used privileges given to them from sympathetic prison staff to alleviate the harshness of incarceration, or, in Penrose's case, to help another inmate defy incarceration outright.

Although privileges like those offered to Penrose were not supposed to be given according to penitentiary protocols, when given they provided female inmates with the opportunity to react against penitentiary discipline. In county jails especially, and sometimes in the state penitentiaries, women resorted to overt forms of resistance. These more aggressive, destructive, and sometimes violent outbursts obstructed prison order and discipline at both the state and county level, though they were perhaps more prevalent in the county jails. The use of numerous methods to flout prison rules, protest against poor conditions, or attempt to ease the harshness of incarceration demonstrates that many female inmates were not simply passive sufferers of the prison systems. Women actively made their presence known in the institutions and often caused significant disruptions to the order and discipline of these prisons, while the prisons used anonymity and isolation as tools to break criminals of their past bad behavior in order to rebuild them as rehabilitated, law-abiding citizens.

Women's experiences in Pennsylvania's antebellum prisons are representative of the overall experience of female inmates during the antebellum period, particularly in the northern states. Using Pennsylvania's female inmates as a case study provides a lens through which female reactions to incarceration can be examined. I am not suggesting, however, that only female inmates challenged their imprisonment. Numerous accounts of male inmates in penitentiaries illustrate that all prisoners had the capacity to defy the system. For example, at Eastern State, one male inmate was "cured" with a stint in a straitjacket for being "a little stubborn." Other male inmates at the penitentiary were punished for "ridiculing the minister" and "impudence to one of the keepers." Another man "broke the sky light and made much noise."⁵ Some used violence toward the keepers. One prisoner was struck by an employee when the employee heard noise coming from his cell. Upon entering the cell, the inmate was "in possession of a hickory club, about 3 feet long, and an inch or 1¼ in circumference." When asked to hand the club to the guard, the inmate refused, causing a physical altercation.⁶ In her analysis of the role of religion in New York's penitentiaries during the antebellum period, Jennifer Graber demonstrates that violent corporal punishment was commonly used to punish inmates for resistance to prison protocols. The violence was viewed as a tool to facilitate inmate obedience and reform.⁷

Although male inmates certainly resisted their imprisonment or protested conditions, women's reactions against incarceration seemed to pose more of a problem to officials because of the small populations of female inmates.

Mark Kann argues that “they were considered worse than male criminals because they were expected to be better than men.”⁸ At Ohio’s state penitentiary in the 1840s, the prison’s “nine women gave more trouble than the institution’s five hundred males.”⁹

Focusing on female inmates’ reactions to their imprisonment in Pennsylvania’s nineteenth-century prisons offers an opportunity to more fully understand and analyze women’s daily lives while incarcerated. It is generally known that female inmates constituted a significantly smaller prison population than did male offenders. As a result, women’s experiences in these early prisons are often not deeply explored by scholars. Kann argues that “women’s small numbers in prisons had terrible consequences for the few females residing there. . . . They were often treated as unsalvageable human refuse to be buried rather than human beings to be rehabilitated.” He suggests that because there was such a small population, prison officials could not justify the expense that it would cost to provide separate staff and provisions for female inmates, which “subjected women to institutional neglect.”¹⁰ Kann is not alone in his observations. He and other scholars are correct in contending that the small population of female inmates in most prisons created dire consequences for those individuals. Nicole Hahn Rafter observes that there was “considerable variation in the degree to which inmates of custodial women’s institutions were subjected to rigid discipline.” Some institutions made women follow the same strict protocol that male inmates did, while others “showed little concern for order,” sometimes leading to “chaotic, dangerous, or brutal conditions.”¹¹

There was a trend in numerous state penitentiaries for officials to neglect female inmates and not enforce all the prison rules on them. In New York’s Auburn prison, for example, women were simply relegated to an attic room, “consigned to oblivion” where windows were kept shut even in the summer to prohibit communication with male inmates. Officials at Sing-Sing in New York did not want women at the institution and tried to get female inmates incarcerated at other places in the state, but by the early 1840s a separate women’s prison was constructed on the grounds at Sing-Sing. Even so, the female prison was tied to Sing-Sing, and the women in the new prison still faced poor living conditions and no attempt at reformation.¹² In Illinois, women prisoners faced similar living conditions. Prison employees blamed the few female inmates housed at the institutions for all the prisons’ problems.¹³

The state penitentiary in Maryland made more of an attempt at the outset to treat female inmates more equitably. They were housed in a separate

wing of the prison and worked "in a separate yard at spinning, knitting, and laundry" and were not allowed to interact with the male inmates. The women were not, however, subjected to silence and separation at night as was the custom of prisons utilizing the Auburn system of discipline. Women slept up to ten to a room, and two to three to a bed.¹⁴

In the Pennsylvania case, neglect of this small population and the special treatment many female inmates experienced because officials ignored the penitentiary's discipline program is evident. What took place behind the walls of Pennsylvania jails indicates that officials wanted to or felt they needed to treat these inmates differently, sometimes more leniently. As a result, punishment was inconsistent. There was also little rehabilitation. The women, however, rejected the idea held by most prison officials and some reformers that they were to be ignored or were beyond redemption. An undated letter from Pennsylvania prison reformer Roberts Vaux to Mary Waln Wistar, a woman who spearheaded reform efforts geared toward female inmates, exemplified the common attitude held by most reformers that female inmates presented hopeless cases for reform. Vaux suggested that female inmates were "a circulating medium of poverty & vice" and were, in most cases, "beyond restoration."¹⁵ While the few sources from the female inmate perspective do not mention if they themselves believed they were beyond hope, their varied reactions to incarceration suggest that they were unwilling to be neglected and ignored in the oppressive penitentiary system.

Understanding the environment in which these female inmates were placed in both the penitentiaries and county jails is critical to appreciating the ways in which women responded to their imprisonment. The Pennsylvania penitentiary system was established in the late eighteenth century to address the inadequacy of jails in use at the time. Inmates lived together in one room without classification according to the crime committed and no effort was made to rehabilitate the inmates. Early prisons acted as holding pens for all sorts of offenders, including witnesses held to testify in trials, debtors, vagrants, and those awaiting trial.

Reform groups such as the Philadelphia-based Pennsylvania Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (later known as the Pennsylvania Prison Society) worked to better the prison systems in the state. These reformers wanted to separate inmates from each other which, they hoped, would create more healthful living conditions. Prisoner separation, reformers believed, would allow for rehabilitation. Forcing inmates to live together precluded reformers from paying individual attention to inmates. Prisoners also

ran the risk of being further corrupted by other inmates' ideas and behaviors. In the Walnut Street Jail in downtown Philadelphia, which later became the state's first penitentiary in 1790, for instance, inmates were grouped together according to the offenses committed. Vagrants were separated from individuals waiting to testify in trials, and defendants waiting to be tried were separated from inmates who had been convicted and were serving a sentence. Separation of inmates was supposed to encourage repentance and rehabilitation. The penitentiary system, beginning with Walnut Street, and continuing with Eastern and Western State penitentiaries, promoted a style of punishment that combined isolation and rehabilitation. This punishment plan was innovative; it attempted to find a more humane way to punish offenders. In practice, however, isolation had negative effects on the inmates.¹⁶

Reformers disdained the use of corporal and public punishment, arguing that it simply humiliated the criminal and did nothing to change behavior. Reformers hoped the fear of incarceration rather than the forms of corporal punishment used earlier in the eighteenth century would deter future criminals. Although employees were not supposed to, at times they resorted to physical punishment to deal with refractory inmates.

With the opening of Walnut Street, judges from across the state could choose to send convicts to this prison as opposed to holding them in their respective county jails.¹⁷ When Walnut Street Jail became too small to hold convicts from across the state, plans were made for the construction of Western State Penitentiary and Eastern State Penitentiary or Cherry Hill, located in Philadelphia. Western opened in 1826, and Eastern received its first inmate in 1829. These new penitentiaries ushered in a new era of penal discipline. Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont best describe the shift in punishment between Walnut Street Jail and the new penitentiaries on either end of the state:

The principles to be followed in the construction of these two establishments were, however, not entirely the same as those on which the Walnut Street prison had been erected. In the latter, classification formed the predominant system, to which solitary confinement was but secondary. In the new prisons the classifications were abandoned, and a solitary cell was to be prepared for each convict. . . . Thus absolute solitary confinement, which in Walnut Street was but accidental, was now to become the foundation of the system adopted for Pittsburg and Cherry-Hill.¹⁸

Inmates in these new penitentiaries were subjected to constant isolation and silence in the hopes that it would provide ample time for inmates to reflect on their crimes, realize the errors of their ways, and in turn reform their ways. Inmates who entered the penitentiaries quickly became anonymous members of the prison population. Women especially, due to their small numbers, ran the risk of becoming lost in the system. Women's reactions to their incarceration in these state penitentiaries show that they fought against this danger. They often employed subtle forms of protest against their imprisonment, while some resorted to outright, sometimes violent, acts of resistance. Some women used the privileges given to them by prison employees, like Penrose, to resist prison protocols, and yet others left writings that showed they refused to disappear once incarcerated, using words to resist being forgotten.¹⁹

It is little wonder that inmates of Eastern State would want to resist their incarceration. Those held at Eastern entered a building that was constructed to "impart a grave, severe, and awful character."²⁰ The prison was a monument to terror and the unknown. The outside wall was approximately thirty feet high and the walls and floors were made of stone, two feet thick in order to prevent escape. A central hub in the courtyard acted as an observation point of the seven cell blocks that radiated from the hub.²¹ The radial design allowed guards "to command a view of every prisoner without his knowledge or observation." For light and ventilation, each cell had a narrow skylight, known as "dead-eyes" or the "eye of God."²² These skylights tantalized inmates, providing them with only a small sliver of freedom's prospect. Furthermore, the religious connotation of the moniker "eye of God" symbolizes not only God's omnipresent observation of the inmates, but also that of the institution. Each prisoner was also provided with a private area for exercise to enable constant isolation.²³

Upon an inmate's arrival, the prison physician examined him or her for any health concerns. Then the warden and overseers inspected the new inmate to become "acquainted with his or her person and countenance."²⁴ After this initial admission process, the inmate was "then clothed in the uniform of the prison, a hood or cap is drawn over his face, and he is conducted to his cell. The bandage is removed from his eyes, and he is interrogated as to his former life." Here the inmate learned the prison rules and was left in silence and isolation.²⁵ From the moment inmates entered their cells, they were enveloped in anonymity as the admission process stripped them of their identity. Prisoner resistance speaks volumes of attempts to hold on to some level of personal identity and self-worth.

In 1835 the Pennsylvania legislature undertook an investigation of protocols at the penitentiary, which uncovered numerous incidents of female inmates flouting prison protocols. At the time of the investigation, there were only four women in the prison. Amy Rogers, inmate 73, and Henrietta Johnson, inmate 74, were admitted in April of 1831 for manslaughter. Rogers was sentenced to three years, and Johnson was to serve six years. In December 1831 two more women entered Eastern State. Inmates 100 and 101, Ann Hinson and Eliza Anderson respectively, were sentenced to two years each for manslaughter. It is possible these two women worked together to commit the crime since they had the same sentence and entered on the same day.²⁶ All women were of African descent. Amy Rogers was a washerwoman. Ann Hinson and Eliza Anderson were married and each had children, and Henrietta Johnson and Ann Hinson were noted as being able to read. All four were relatively young, only in their twenties.²⁷ Aside from their crimes, which were violent (most women were incarcerated for property crimes), these women were typical female inmates. The women's central roles in the testimony given in the investigation indicate a breakdown of prison discipline and demonstrate that the small female inmate population had the power to act against the prison's protocols.

Like Maria Penrose in Western State Penitentiary, the four women incarcerated at Eastern State during its early years experienced special treatment, presumably because of their sex. This differential treatment would eventually lead to the hiring of a matron and the enactment of stricter discipline for the female inmates. The actions of these women, which the investigation uncovered, spoke to their ability to use what privileges were given to them by the keepers to ease the severity of their imprisonment and break prison rules.²⁸

Witnesses in the investigation testified to the incarcerated women defying prison regulations. In some instances, female inmates were allowed to drink liquor and attend parties. Inmate 100, "a black woman by the name of Anne . . . a convict, was present when I [employee William Griffith] went down. She appeared to be sitting looking on—dressed in a calico dress with a turban about her head." Griffith later noted that after one of these parties, a different inmate, "a black woman by the name of Eliza . . . was so much intoxicated that she was scarcely able to walk alone." After Griffith had placed her in her cell, she "continued to be a good deal troublesome all the time I stayed up, knocking and crying." The acquisition of liquor by the women seemed to be a continuing problem. Griffith noted that on one occasion Ann was found "lying drunk in the kitchen," stating "there was some stir about this" since

the watchman's wife, Mrs. Blundin, was charged with providing the liquor.²⁹ Officials appeared to tolerate the women's flouting of prison rules; some employees were often complicit in these transgressions by giving privileges to the women. Little was done to curb the female inmates' behavior or stop the employees from freely giving privileges. The opportunity to defy prison protocols and have privileges allowed these women to have a less severe incarceration than many inmates.

Other instances of Eastern's female prisoner protest show more direct action on the part of inmates. Amy Rogers made complaints about her treatment to visiting inspectors. She told Judge Charles S. Coxe that "she had been compelled to wash clothes of the officers that were soiled with venereal matter, and medical substances, designed for that disease." Rogers was "apprehensive that the disease might be communicated to her—if there was a fracture of the skin while she was washing." She complained that Mrs. Blundin, the watchman's wife who was supposed to be in charge of the washing and appeared to have been informally in charge of the female inmates, went to Amy in her cell "exhibited to her her person with the mark of the disease and asked her to assist her in washing it, and in applying the remedies."³⁰ These requests went far beyond what should have been expected of the inmates. On a later date, Judge Coxe visited her again. Upon arriving at Rogers's cell, he recalled:

She was very much affected—in tears and crying—she alleged that she had been taken out of her cell, and put into this one without a yard, and that it all arose from her having communicated those facts to me—that two men had come into her washing apartment to put up a stove, that one of them was a first cousin of Mrs. Blundin's, and that they had contrived to make a quarrel with her—had attacked her about the charge she had made—had roundly taken her to task, and so on—that she answered them pretty sharply—they had complained to Mr. Wood, and Mr. Wood had had her locked up in this cell.³¹

Her discussions with Judge Coxe indicate that Rogers knew her rights as an inmate.³² She seemed aware that what Mrs. Blundin asked of her could be seen as exploitive and used the opportunity to make her claim to Judge Coxe who was charged with making sure that the prison was run in an ethical manner. Clearly, Rogers knew she had the power to complain about her treatment. Rogers initiated action against the prison system by following prison policies, yet was subsequently punished for it.³³

Women in the penitentiary also subverted prison rules in a blatant manner. They broke tools, made messes in their cells, and disturbed the prison with noise and yelling.³⁴ It is possible that outright forms of resistance from female inmates at Eastern State became more common after the investigation of 1835, once a matron was hired and there were more female inmates at the prison. It was not until 1835 when the penitentiary consistently had female admissions to the institution. Until this point, the only female inmates at Eastern State were the four who were involved in the investigation. Because there were only four women and because they were often given privileges, it is understandable why these early female inmates reacted to their imprisonment using more subtle forms of protest rather than outright resistance.

Some female inmates did not have to use privileges given to them in order to resist the penal institution. Records of Eastern State Penitentiary's moral instructor, Baptist minister Thomas Larcombe, indicate that some women fought the prison system's attempt at reformation of their personal characters, while others accepted reform efforts. The penitentiaries' daily routine centered on providing inmates with ample time to reflect on their crimes and to seek religious salvation. Silent reflection, isolation, access to Bibles and religious tracts, visits with the moral instructor, and weekly sermons all were meant to facilitate inmate reform. Even Dorothea Dix, famed prison reformer and advocate for the mentally ill who visited each prison around the state of Pennsylvania in 1845, remarked that "the moral, religious and mental instruction" of Eastern State was "more thorough and complete than is supplied to the convicts of any prison in the United States."³⁵

While the reform program may have appeared to be thorough to outside observers, inmates did not always welcome the reformation attempts. Inmate Ann Johnson, alias Ann Davis, for example, showed "no promise of awakening conviction." She was, according to Larcombe, "altogether indifferent to religious instruction."³⁶ It is possible that women like Ann Johnson did not care to become a pawn in the penitentiary officials' attempt to demonstrate that their penal system could restore inmates' morality. At the same time, Johnson's resistance to Larcombe's visits and teachings may have been a small way that she held on to her independence while incarcerated. Another explanation is that she merely did not desire religious teaching.

Other female inmates feigned interest in reformation, perhaps in an attempt to garner privileges in the prison or even a reduced sentence. Larcombe was often skeptical of the inmates' ability to be reformed and became skilled in seeing through the false professions of sincerity and

piety—characteristics of a soul slowly being reformed under the prison's system. Harriet Lane, sentenced to two years for committing larceny, gave "evidence of being old in crime" according to Larcombe. He wrote in his journal that she "seems subdued, wept plentifully during my visit & has seemed deeply concerned for her soul." Later on, he noted that since his previous visit, Lane "has been addicted to falsehood & deceit." Her behavior disturbed Larcombe, who determined that "no confidence can be placed in anything she says."³⁷

Mary Ann Rogers presents another such case. She spent a year in Eastern State for robbery. Larcombe wrote that she "feels deeply & bitterly her lost name & liberty and will promise anything to any person who would get her out" and that she "is certain that a complete & perfect reform should take place." When she was released, Larcombe had "not much hope" in her reformation.³⁸ These entries illustrate instances of inmates who may have tried to manipulate the system or challenge its severity by feigning interest in reform. While it is possible that these women truly did at one point want to reform themselves, it appears that their contradictory behavior gave Larcombe pause. The behavior and statements of Lane and Rogers shows that they were aware of the goals of the prison and tried to use the system for their benefit—but not in the way officials desired. Larcombe sensed the lack of sincerity of some inmates and failed to give in to their manipulation of his reform efforts.

Prison writings, such as letters and poems, became another means by which female inmates challenged the anonymity imposed by the prison system in a deeply personal way. Their writings show an attempt to cling to their personalities and maintain a connection with the outside world.³⁹ Writings by incarcerated women illustrate that some female inmates pushed back against the system by writing about their experiences, expressing their feelings, and, in some cases, producing creative works.⁴⁰

Few written sources remain from female inmates from Eastern State Penitentiary. Julia Wilt, otherwise known as Julia Moore, is one such woman who left a written record.⁴¹ Although there was not a lengthy trial record in the newspaper (her case is only mentioned briefly in the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* on May 19, 1839), a pamphlet, written later, provides a detailed account of her incarceration. The pamphlet discusses the criminal exploits that landed her in the penitentiary. Moore, it points out, was "exposed to temptation" and "proceeded from one vice to another, until hardened in guilt"; she participated "in a cruel robbery, was arrested, and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, before she had completed her twenty-eighth year."⁴²

Julia is portrayed as a model prisoner: penitent, quiet, thoughtful, and truly thankful for her incarceration. Although most of the pamphlet is written anonymously, it does claim to copy a letter “precisely in her own language,” from Julia to a female visitor of the penitentiary. This letter, dated April 27, 1843, is the closest we get to Julia’s own voice. She wrote the letter “to inform my sincere friend that I am very feeble at present.” Julia was ill and wished to express her gratitude to the visitor for making her incarceration easier. She continued, “I feel thankful that I have been spared to express the sense of gratitude I feel for those benefits you have all been pleased to confer upon me.” Moore found religious salvation in the prison and hoped that in her remaining days “the Lord will give me courage, strength and faith, that my soul may be saved, and his name be glorified.”⁴³ While Julia’s letter seems to illustrate that she was content with her plight in prison, her written words demonstrate that she wanted to be remembered, even if it was only to the prison visitor she befriended. Even in her dying days, Moore refused to simply fade away; her letter allowed her to be remembered, challenging the prison’s isolationist program.

Although one might question the authenticity of this letter, since there are so few documents from the inmates’ perspectives, one has to think about this letter as being, to some extent, genuine. Since prison records note that she could only read, Julia Moore may have spoken these sentiments to someone who transcribed them into a letter format so as to make it appear she had written the words herself. It is possible, however, that Moore’s statements were reinterpreted in some manner by those who published the pamphlet. Prison policies dictated that “none but the official visitors can have any communication with the convicts, nor shall any visitor whatever be permitted to deliver to or receive from any of the convicts, any letter or message whatever” as enacted by article VII of “Rules for the Government of the Penitentiary,” passed on April 23, 1829.⁴⁴ In the 1844 *Annual Report for Eastern State*, however, there is an indication that letter writing in some instances was allowed. The warden reported: “I have frequently witnessed with pleasure the pride and exultation a convict has evinced on handing out his first letter, written to his parents or relations, as a proof of having attained that art [writing] in prison.”⁴⁵ This is the first annual report to note that inmates were able to send out letters, indicating that the early rule of prohibiting communication with the outside world was at some point not enforced by prison officials, but the date of this shift is unclear.

Other sources indicate that letter writing may have been more common in the prison than originally intended. Francis Lieber reprinted a conversation

he had with a female inmate whom Charles Dickens had also interviewed for his *American Notes*:

I have been here four years, and shall remain three years longer. I am nearly twenty-one years old, and feel very well here. They treat me with much kindness. I have learned here to read and write, and pray. Every Monday some ladies come to teach us. . . . I have written my first letter to my mother, asked her pardon and permission to let me come home when I get out here. She has written kindly back to me.⁴⁶

This young woman can only be identified as one of three African American women sentenced to seven years for a conspiracy to rob.⁴⁷ Through her letter and interview with Lieber, this female inmate ceased to be an anonymous inmate, completely cut off from the free world. Letter writing and working to reform her character allowed this young woman and Julia Moore to resist simply withering away in the isolation of the penitentiary.

Letter writing created a connection with those who were free and thus could undo the strict isolation and anonymity that made the Pennsylvania system of discipline unique. It is likely that officials determined that letter writing may have aided in the reformation process as opposed to hindering it.⁴⁸ A more cynical suggestion is that these early letters were allowed to be written and later published because officials wished to promote their prison system. Letters from inmates extolling the virtues of the penitentiary might bolster support for their cause. This may be especially true of the Julia Moore pamphlet because it is a very positive portrayal of prison life featuring Moore as a model inmate. Her story was one that might have quieted Eastern State's critics as it illustrated the acceptance of her crimes and redemption before death. Since the pamphlet was published by a reform organization, it is likely that Moore's experience was detailed in a very specific, intentional way to promote the Pennsylvania system of discipline. Because so few letters from inmates in these early days remain (or ever existed), the appearance of letter writing may be a combination of these possibilities. In any case, those women who were able to write letters or have their stories told to a wider audience refused to disappear into the anonymity of the penitentiary system.

One set of letters and poems from a female inmate at Eastern State illustrates how writing provided a creative outlet for prisoners to help them weather their incarceration and to hold on to their personal identity

in the prison's anonymous environment. Unlike the letters from Julia Moore and the woman Lieber interviewed, this set of writings appears to have avoided interference from reformers. In early 1862 a female inmate, Elizabeth Velora Elwell, wrote a series of letters to another prisoner, Albert Jackson Green. These are valuable sources regarding prison life in the mid nineteenth-century and indicate that Eastern State continued to struggle with prisoner separation and discipline. Writing created a way for inmates to express their feelings about life and incarceration. On April 18, 1862, Elwell wrote: "It is with in my lonseome sell that I take my pen in hand to inform you that my heart was very sad after leaving you to night but hope to see you every day but my dear Albert there is a time coming when we will not have to run when any one is coming." She warned him not to "let them hear you speak of me my dear" and to "be carfull not to let them catch you standing at the gate for they will mistrust us."⁴⁹ In another letter penned four days later, Elwell wrote: "Oh dear one if we were out we wood not have but to creep in the holes to talk one minet." Elwell described the hurt she felt at leaving Green in a later letter: "My dear I am most dead every night When I come up to the old Sell and leave you my dear honey . . . may we see the time my dear that we will not have to go to the cole seller to talk one woord."⁵⁰

In addition to these love letters, Elwell composed poems in her cell. One in particular seems to capture her feelings on being imprisoned, and it illustrates how writing provided her with a way to maintain her own personality and keep her mind active:

Poetrysies

It is very sad to be so lonley
And far from friends or home
But may my love proove to be true
To cheer my sad hart ever more

It is very hard for me to be so gloomey
But sad misfortune did me imploore
My hart was not weeke nor did it falter
Till I see my sad state in the world so wretched

It makes my hart bleede to think of my place
And hear from friends most dear so faraway

But one friend I trust I have found who is
In the captivity with me and many otherse⁵¹

With themes of loneliness and sadness, the poem demonstrates what are most likely typical emotions experienced by an incarcerated person. Poetry became a way to verbalize her feelings, and the writing of it would also act as a distraction for a few moments from her isolation. The poem shows, along with the letters, that she found solace with her friend Albert. It seems that the relationship was a way for Elwell to have something to keep her emotionally connected to not only herself but someone else during her sentence, especially during periods of homesickness and loneliness. In her letters and poetry, one gets a sense of Elwell as a person, a young woman, who experienced natural human emotions. She does not appear to be a monster or fiend in the way that many people viewed female convicts. The writings portray a young woman with a heart and distinct personality, capable of feeling love and anguish. Her writings allowed her to continue to live as Elizabeth, not merely a numbered inmate.

Prison writings, whether they were single letters from Julia Moore to a visitor or the young African American woman to her mother, or Elwell's poetry and extended correspondence with Green, provided a subtle, yet important way by which some female inmates challenged the power of the penitentiary. The written words permitted these women to hold on to some connection to the outside world; it allowed them to continue to survive and not lose their identities in an institution bent on breaking down individuality in order to reform inmates' character. In addition, the writings gave the inmates the power to shape their stories.⁵² The anonymous young woman and Julia Moore may have had their stories interpreted for the purpose of promoting the Pennsylvania penitentiary system since they seem to show how some inmates did benefit from reform efforts and education in prison. For Elizabeth Elwell, her private letters and poetry are evidence that she developed a creative coping strategy for survival during her imprisonment. While her letters and poems may not have ever been meant for a public audience, they show a strong-willed young woman unwilling to become a casualty of anonymity and isolation.

In county prisons across the state women also reacted to their incarceration in multiple ways. The conditions in these jails differed greatly from the two state penitentiaries. Whereas in Western State and Eastern State inmates were subjected to isolation and silence and a regimented daily routine, county

jails did not exact such standards. As a result, inmates in county prisons endured more unorganized, often unhealthy, incarcerations. Women in the Philadelphia County Prison, for example, were subjected to a chaotic environment with a large and fluctuating inmate population and violence. Female inmates in smaller county prisons had to deal with poor, unhealthy conditions and often faced outright neglect from the jailers. In many cases they were allowed to interact with male prisoners, with little regard for their physical health or moral well-being. Female inmates in the county prisons, particularly in Philadelphia's Moyamensing Prison, resisted becoming victims to the turmoil of the institutions. In most cases, their acts of resistance were more visceral in nature. Some women violently fought their incarceration, adding to the bedlam that was endemic to county jails. Such intransigence took the form of vandalism, sassing employees, and sometimes inflicting self-harm. These are the same types of reactions to incarceration utilized by inmates in the penitentiaries. Female penitentiary inmates, during the institution's formative years, had more privileges given to them, resulting in more subtle reactions to their imprisonment. It appears that female inmates in county jails, specifically Moyamensing, had fewer privileges than women incarcerated in the penitentiaries, and thus resorted more often to outright forms of resistance.

Few county jails kept copious records. Sources from the Philadelphia County Prison, Moyamensing, however, provide a glimpse into the daily lives of female inmates in a large county jail setting. Women in this prison, which dealt with a large and fluctuating population, were subjected to neglect and chaos. The records of county prisons both in rural areas and in Philadelphia indicate that these women were treated more like the "human refuse" that Mark Kann suggests.⁵³ As a result, women's reactions to their incarceration in the county prison system take on a more primal, desperate form when compared to the generally more subtle forms of protest that women in the penitentiaries often employed.

The Philadelphia County Prison, located in the Moyamensing district in South Philadelphia, was originally meant to house inmates who had been sentenced for a period not exceeding one year. They were to "suffer punishment . . . by separate confinement at labour for and during the term of their sentence, and shall be fed, clothed and treated nearly as may be practicable, in the same manner as is provided by law in relation to persons confined in the Eastern State Penitentiary, in solitary confinement at labour."⁵⁴ The prison opened on October 19, 1835.⁵⁵ By the 1850s, it was receiving 14,000–15,000

inmates yearly. Its stable population, however, remained around 500.⁵⁶ From 1835 to 1858, 2,950 white males and 1,530 African American males were admitted to the prison, constituting 65.8 percent and 34.2 percent of the male population respectively. Four hundred and eighteen white females, or 44.4 percent of the female population, were admitted during this period, and 523 or 55.6 percent of the females were African American.⁵⁷ Furthermore, it was noted by physician Benjamin H. Coates that society's "most miserable blacks" were often "either convicted for lighter offences, or committed for vagrancy," and the punishment in Philadelphia for both was to be sent to Moyamensing. Prison records indicate that this trend of imprisoning individuals for short periods for vagrancy or disorderly conduct offenses was not limited to African Americans but was applied to white offenders as well. Women incarcerated at Moyamensing to serve out a prison sentence for a more serious crime generally had been convicted of larceny.⁵⁸ Female prisoner resistance inside Moyamensing appears to have stemmed from both groups of inmates.

The construction and protocols of this prison were to mimic, to some extent, the rehabilitative process used in the penitentiaries. The construction of its cells, each with "a separate flue for ventilation, a separate flue for admitting warm air from the furnace, an aperture for admitting cold air, a hydrant, and a water closet," seemed to push for cells for individual prisoners.⁵⁹ Other construction elements allowed for prisoner isolation:

The light is received into the cells through a window 4 inches wide and 4½ feet long, made secure by a cast iron frame glazed with pressed glass, to prevent the prisoner looking out. The casings of the cell doors are made of cast iron. The interior doors are gratings made of wrought iron. The exterior doors are made of wood. The movements of the prisoner may be inspected at any time without his knowledge, through a small aperture made in this door for the purpose, which is ordinarily kept closed.⁶⁰

Visitors also noted the organization and good discipline of the prison in Moyamensing. Dorothea Dix reported glowingly of Moyamensing in 1845. Of the women's department she wrote: "The women's prison, divided by a high wall and intervening garden, is a separate building and establishment, disconnected in all domestic arrangements, from the men's prison. This department is especially well ordered, clean, comfortable, and well managed." Dix noted that she had "visited all the cells in this extensive prison,

and conversed with the prisoners” and that after a “diligent examination of their [the inmates’] condition, and of the general arrangements and the discipline” she deemed the institution to be “conducted in a manner highly creditable to the officers, whose duty it is to govern and direct its affairs.”⁶¹

Although it appears from reports from prison reformers that Moyamensing treated its inmates in the same manner as Eastern and Western State Penitentiary, prison records from the county jail suggest a completely different atmosphere, one fraught with disorder, not much rehabilitation, and consistent prisoner resistance. A prison diary, which was written by the prison employees, details daily occurrences in the female ward from 1850 to 1860.⁶² While many of the entries are mundane, simply noting which employees were on duty, which inspectors visited the prison, or which inmates were ill, some entries uncover the darker layers of female imprisonment in this jail.⁶³

In looking at various excerpts from the diary, several things are of interest. One noticeable theme is the level of disorder caused by the inmates in this part of the prison. This disorder was just one type of action denoting female inmates’ resistance. Women were strapped (restrained with straps) and put in dark cells for offenses such as “indecent singing,” for “insolence and abuse,” for “loud talking to the Men,” “talking down the pipes,” and “mutilating their Bibles.”⁶⁴ Other women found themselves hauled to the dark cell for “being Disorderly and breaking cell furniture” or more violent acts like “drawing a knife on the keeper.”⁶⁵ On April 19, 1850, it was recorded that Catharine Jordin, alias Sarah Smith, was “put in the dark cell for *striking at the keeper and abusing the matron and her assistant and threatening them.*” Prison officials asked the visiting inspector to order Jordin “to be kept locked in her cell and not taken from thence as no kind treatment can subdue the prisoner.”⁶⁶

Some female prisoners were continually troublesome to the prison employees. Margaret Johnston, convicted of larceny in July 1849, occupied much of the keepers’ time with her refractory behavior. In late September 1850 the visiting inspectors were asked to deal with “the abusive conduct” of Johnson because she “has defied all control by the Keepers.” The next day, the diary entry noted that she was “still strap[p]ed” for her bad behavior. A few months later, on December 4, 1850, the diary keeper wrote that Johnson was “chained” and “wishes to see visiting inspector.” On January 22, 1851, Johnson found herself in a dark cell “for Insolence to the Keepers.” The prison staff informed the visiting inspectors that “this prisoner Cannot be subdued unless by this means.”⁶⁷ These punishments did not deter some women. Resistance appears, in some cases, to be a daily occurrence.

Johnson was not the only habitual offender of prison rules. On March 5, 1851, Elizabeth Wagstaff was put in a dark cell for insolence. Wagstaff was deemed "a great annoyance to the Prison."⁶⁸ In August of that year, the visiting inspectors were called to observe Wagstaff as "her conduct is so bad, she keeps the place in Continual Excitement." In early February 1852, the inspectors were called again to visit Wagstaff because "her conduct is so outrageous that the Keepers cannot do anything with her she has destroyed the discipline of the prison." One month later, Wagstaff spent several days in the dark cell for being unruly and refusing to eat. Throughout 1852, Wagstaff plagued the employees with her behavior and thwarted prison order. She was strapped several times for abusing the matron and noise infractions. Prison officials realized that "good treatment makes her worse" and that "she is so outrageous that she keeps the place in a continual uproar from Morning until night." In April 1853 she was strapped again for "breaking her door by hamering." After such a record of resistance to prison discipline, it is doubtful that prison officials were upset at the expiration of her sentence on August 9, 1853.⁶⁹

These inmates (and these few are by no means the only examples of this type of behavior in the diary!) seemed out of control. They were violent, oftentimes threatening to the keepers. Others broke furniture or stole prison property. These refractory inmates concerned officials, prompting inspectors to make frequent visits to their cells. Such behavior was evidence of blatant resistance to their incarceration. These women openly challenged their imprisonment and refused to become silent victims of the system. They made their presence known to employees and inspectors alike through their repeated defiance of the county prison protocols. The ever-fluctuating inmate population seemed to breed a more frenzied resistance. In the penitentiaries, where order was of the utmost importance, female inmate protest appeared to be more often restrained and subtle, whereas in county prisons where there was seemingly much less control, inmate resistance was more widespread and violent.⁷⁰ As a result, officials responded with ever more draconian punishments. Inmates were sometimes restrained by straps; other times they were chained in their cells; and even on some occasions, doused with cold water.⁷¹

These punishments were contrary to the goals of the larger state penitentiaries, where corporal punishment was not supposed to be used on inmates because officials believed that physical pain discouraged rehabilitation. Evidence has shown, however, that Pennsylvania officials did not always adhere to this rule. The use of physical punishments in the county prison suggests that rehabilitation was not a high priority even though county jails were

ideally supposed to follow the penitentiary plan of discipline. The shorter sentences of inmates at the county jail probably made rehabilitation all but impossible to complete, yet reformers attempted to reach some inmates. The violent punishments appear to have been used out of necessity to keep order, especially in such a transient inmate population. It is quite possible that the use of violent punishments also added to the desire of the inmates to resist rules and employees' control, thus creating a perpetual cycle of violence and resistance.

Female inmates also utilized their physical bodies as weapons of resistance. Refusing to eat was one way they resisted their imprisonment or punishments for breaking prison rules. On August 2, 1855, Mary Bates was put in a dark cell for "throwing out the wicket her tins into the corridor maliciously." During her time in the dark cell, a period of a few days, Bates refused "to take her bread" and dashed "her water out of her pan." Others followed suit.⁷² By going on what could be considered a hunger strike, these women demonstrated to their keepers that they still held some means of control over their incarceration. Women used what little they had in their control as mechanisms for resistance, and choosing not to eat provided one way not to become a passive victim of imprisonment. While it is unknown how extensive these hunger strikes were, these few examples show the lengths to which some women were willing to go in order to get attention from the prison keepers, protest their living conditions, and, generally, challenge the prison system's disciplinary regime.

Other women found more extreme ways to use their bodies as tools of resistance. During the night of October 28, 1851, Elizabeth Young made such a commotion in the prison that the next day's entry in the diary noted that she was "very outrageous last night & made an attempt to strangle herself." On November 20, 1851, prison employees found two convicts in a cell; one of them had "attempted to hang herself."⁷³ The inmate was saved, and the two women were put in separate cells. Caroline Erwin was discovered and cut down by the keepers after she tried to hang herself. For her suicide attempt, she was chained in her cell.⁷⁴

While some entries on attempted suicides are brief, such as the ones above, other cases prompted the diary author to detail the event more closely. In early November 1854, an inmate named Mary Smith "attempted to hang herself" to the window grating by "tearing up her bed quilt into strips." Prison employees found her in time and cut her down. Prison officials deemed that a deep feeling of despondency caused her suicide attempt.⁷⁵ A little over a

month later, on December 12, 1854, it was recorded that Ann O'Conner had a fit, causing the matron and assistant "to relieve her." When they arrived at her cell, they "found her face Purple, they tried to resuscitate her, in so doing, they found two cords one on each arm tied very tight also one around her waist stopping the circulation of blood." As a result, O'Conner "was stripped, and she fought manfully to prevent it, but she was overcome and was ordered to a solitary cell."⁷⁶ In late August 1856, inmate Kate Murray tried at least twice to kill herself. She was chained for her attempt "to hang herself." She "got a good choke" and was cut down by the prison keeper. In a second diary entry, Murray had "amused herself by choking herself by wrapping strips of blanket around her throat." As punishment she "was put in the shower bath."⁷⁷

These entries point to the pure desolation of prison life, and the need for more specialized treatment and care for these women, especially those inmates demonstrating emotional and mental distress. The cases of self-harm can be viewed as an outright form of inmate resistance, since the women attempted to regain control over their bodies and lives. In these cases where suicides were prevented, the women were promptly punished, indicating that employees may have viewed these actions as a threat to the prison system as opposed to a sign of the inmates' deeper emotional or mental issues. By the 1850s it had become obvious to many in the prison reform movement that isolation had detrimental effects on the emotional and mental capacities of inmates in the state penitentiaries, so it is not surprising to see evidence of mental anguish in Moyamensing. In the cases of self-harm, such inmate actions indicated a need for more individual and specialized care, especially in an institution where inmate rehabilitation could not easily be a main priority due to its large and transient population.⁷⁸

While the records indicate that in the 1850s violent punishments may have been used to correct inmates, this was not the case a decade earlier (1839–41). A punishment register, which reports inmate infractions and punishments, illustrates this trend. As table 1 shows, punishments for female inmates consisted of either time in a dark cell, or something noted as "cell and allowance," likely a combination of being kept in their cells and a reduction of food rations for the duration of the punishment.⁷⁹ The infractions for which the inmates were punished ranged from talking offenses, which made up the majority of the offenses, to impudent behavior, to breaking cell furniture, and refusing to work. Although the rule violations in the late 1830s and early 1840s were similar to those perpetrated by resisting

TABLE 1. Philadelphia County jail punishments for female offenders, 1839–1841

Type of Offense	Number of Offenses	Dark Cell	Cell and Allowance ^a	Not Specified
Talking offenses	140	20	120	
Destroying prison property	7	2	5	
Impudence	12	9	3	
Not working	8	4	4	
Indecent language	3	2		1
Stealing	1	1		

^aThis punishment probably entailed being left in their cells with reduced provisions.

females in the 1850s, the punishments were not nearly as violent. Because the majority of the infractions were for talking, it suggests that the county prison tried to emulate the regime of silent penitentiary discipline. By looking at this ledger, and then the evidence in the prison diary a decade later, there is a sense that the county jail failed to approximate the penitentiary protocols and let certain regulations lapse as the years progressed. As a result, there seems to be a marked increase in physical punishments by the time the diary was written in the 1850s. The shift in types of punishment is likely due in part to the rapidly increasing population in the county prison. It is also possible that the shift in types of punishments reflected the more violent levels of prisoner resistance. The treatment of inmates in the county jail by the 1850s seems almost reminiscent of the conditions of the prisons in the eighteenth century—an environment that most prison reformers sought to eradicate.⁸⁰

Female inmate resistance occurred in urban settings and less populated locations as well, but in rural locales usually only serious events were reported in the written record. One example from northern Pennsylvania illustrates the relative ease with which some female inmates in county jails resisted their imprisonment. In Sullivan County, Pennsylvania, in 1855 Anna Maria Veitengruber was imprisoned for her part in the murder of her husband, John. The Veitengrubers were German immigrants and allowed another immigrant, John Kamm, to live with them. John Veitengruber was killed by Kamm with an axe after he discovered Kamm and his wife romantically linked. Mrs. Veitengruber assisted Kamm in burying the body, and the pair was arrested several months later. Mrs. Veitengruber maintained her innocence and accused Kamm of the murder, who was convicted and hanged in the fall of 1856.

Claiming mental instability, Mrs. Veitengruber demanded a separate trial, which only delayed her fate. She remained in the Sullivan County Jail, where the sheriff treated her kindly and "permitted her more liberties than he would have allowed another prisoner."⁸¹ At some point during her incarceration, Mrs. Veitengruber took advantage of her privileges and escaped on November 19, 1858. She was never apprehended. A reward advertisement was placed in the *Sullivan County Democrat* on November 23, 1858, providing twenty-five dollars for the person who returned Anna Maria Veitengruber to the prison. She was described as being "about thirty-seven years of age . . . with strongly marked features, and with light, thin short hair. She has a gray blue eye and a large mouth" and only spoke "the English language but very brokenly."⁸² While we have very little information about Anna Maria Veitengruber's involvement in the murder, she must have felt that she would have been found guilty. It could be that she believed that by escaping she stood a better chance of survival. Furthermore, because she was an immigrant and had little experience with English, she may not have trusted her chances of receiving a fair trial. Instead, she chose to take advantage of her situation and flee, unwilling to remain a prisoner.

Official reports on the conditions of the county prisons suggest that many were disorganized and ill-equipped, providing environments conducive to prisoner resistance. There was "no regular code of discipline" used to punish inmates at the Bedford County Jail. In Chester County, the prison was constructed in a way that "criminals and debtors—juvenile and old offenders—have to mingle together both day and night, all having the privilege of the yard from sunrise to sunset," yet men and women were separated. Mifflin County's jail only gave blankets to inmates for bedding, and disorderly inmates were simply locked up and given less food.⁸³

Dorothea Dix, in her observations of Pennsylvania's jails, noted that Lancaster County jail used "fettters and collar" for punishment, and the only solitary cells in the prison were damp, in the cellar of the building, and generally disused. In Adams County, Dix found "A young girl, very insane, had not long been removed from the jail, where she was loaded with heavy chains, and endured all the exposures and sufferings incident to a situation in all respects so unsuitable. At times she was very violent." At the Allegheny County jail, Dix reported that inmates had ample time on their hands. Instead of industrious work, inmates conducted "various little works of skill and ingenuity for facilitating oral communication," and they were especially fond of "cutting the doors in pieces, or rather cutting such apertures

through them, as in default of clairvoyance assisted vision and promoted a social feeling, by increasing facilities for conversation." Disorganization and resistance in county jails, then, although endemic to Moyamensing, was not unique to the institution in Philadelphia.⁸⁴

Female inmate reaction to incarceration in Pennsylvania's antebellum prisons manifested itself in a variety of ways. Women acted out against their imprisonment using both subtle forms of protest and outright acts of defiance and resistance. Female inmates in Eastern State Penitentiary in particular used subtle ways to subvert the disciplinary system based on anonymity, isolation, and reform. Letters and poetry written by these inmates allowed them to hold on to their identity as individuals, something that the penitentiaries' system of discipline wished to break down in order to rebuild the inmates as reformed citizens. Other women used privileges given to them by the prison employees to ease their time in prison. Women at Eastern State often were out of their cells to work, participated in social gatherings, and were sometimes given extra food. These privileges alleviated the severity of their incarceration, and female inmates were willing to use the opportunities given to them, even if it went against prison policy. Prison employees were, ultimately, complicit in prisoner defiance of the rules. At Western State, Maria Penrose's privilege to be out of her cell led to an act of outright resistance when she helped another inmate escape. Some women went beyond the use of privileges or subtle protest in their reactions to incarceration. Female inmates at Eastern State made noise, broke tools, and refused to work, thwarting the disciplinary code of the penitentiary. Others simply did not care to become part of the rehabilitation process and refused moral instruction.

The reaction of women prisoners at the county level was much more violent and direct, commonly exercising blatant forms of resistance. The higher levels of physical violence and inmate neglect in the county prisons reflected the disorder inherent in these institutions due to fluctuating populations and, in rural areas, ill-equipped jails and untrained employees. Women inmates, especially in Philadelphia's Moyamensing Prison, found myriad ways to defy prison authority. Physical acts of violence toward the keepers and toward prison property were common. Disruptive noise infractions and attempting to hurt themselves became other means by which women challenged authority. In an institution where reform of the inmates was not much of a priority, prisoner resistance simply threatened the order, tenuous as it may have been to begin with, of the prison. Women in the county prisons might not have felt like they could disappear into the depths of the prison system as women

in the state penitentiaries may have felt, but their acts of resistance suggest a will to survive imprisonment and make their presence known in an otherwise crowded environment.

Many women in Pennsylvania's penitentiaries and county prisons were not willing to become passive victims of their incarceration. Their use of privileges, subtle modes of subversion such as writing, and more direct acts of resistance such as vandalism, threatening, or committing self-harm, demonstrated the lengths to which female inmates went to defy prison authority and protest their conditions. Through their actions, female inmates attempted to take back a measure of control over their incarceration and their lives by refusing to allow the penal institutions and their employees to control them to the extent that prison officials had envisioned.

NOTES

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1. "Minutes of the Board of Inspectors and Board of Trustees of the Western State Penitentiary," April 2, 1827, Record Group (RG) 15, Department of Justice, Bureau of Corrections, Western State Penitentiary, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (hereafter PHMC). For more on the early years of Western State Penitentiary, see Eugene E. Doll, "Trial and Error at Allegheny: The Western State Penitentiary, 1818–1838," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 81, no. 1 (1957): 3–27.
2. "Convict Docket, 1826–1859" and "Descriptive Register," RG 15, PHMC. Over 70 percent of female inmates admitted to Western State Penitentiary from 1826 to 1860 were African American. The overrepresentation of African Americans in Pennsylvania's early penitentiaries was a consistent problem. See Leslie Patrick-Stamp, "Numbers That Are Not New: African Americans in the Country's First Prison, 1790–1835," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 119, nos. 1/2 (1995): 95–128.
3. Jennifer Janofsky argues that at Eastern State prison guards' allegiances sometimes wavered between the warden and the prisoners. Because many hailed from the working classes, guards sometimes related better to the inmates than they could with middle-class prison reformers. See Jennifer Janofsky, "'There is no hope for me': Eastern State Penitentiary, 1829–1856" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2004), 186–87. If guards sometimes sympathized with male inmates, it is possible that some also felt compassion toward the few female inmates in the prison at any given time. The treatment of Maria Penrose is one example of this. How widespread kind sentiment was toward female inmates is almost impossible to quantify.
4. Another, more lurid story of a woman hatching an escape plan for an inmate at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail is the case of Ann Carson. While not an inmate at the time, Carson devised

- several plans to save her husband from hanging in 1816, even planning to blow up the jail if necessary. See Susan Branson's *Dangerous to Know: Women Crime and Notoriety in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 46–50. Ann herself was no stranger to crime and imprisonment, creating for herself an infamous existence.
5. February, June, and November, 1833, "Warden's Daily Journals, 1829–1961," RG 15, PHMC.
 6. Thomas B. McElwee, *A concise history of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, together with a detailed statement of the proceedings of the committee, appointed by the legislature, December 6th, 1834, for the purpose of examining into the economy and management of that institution, embracing the testimony taken on that occasion, and legislative proceedings connected therewith* (Philadelphia: Neall and Massey, 1835), 183–84.
 7. Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Afflictions: Prisons and Religion in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). How to discipline refractory inmates was a continuous problem throughout the northeastern penitentiaries. See also Mark E. Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), and Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760–1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
 8. Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy*, 15.
 9. Nicole Hahn Rafter, "Prisons for Women, 1790–1980," *Crime and Justice* 5 (1983): 145.
 10. Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy*, 15, 194. Also see Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women in State Prisons, 1800–1935* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), particularly chapter 1, which provides a brief overview of women's treatment in state prisons before the Civil War.
 11. Rafter, "Prisons for Women," 145. For more on women's experiences in Pennsylvania's prisons, see Jennifer Manion, "Women's Crime and Prison Reform in Early Pennsylvania, 1786–1829" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2008); Leslie Patrick, "Ann Hinson: A Little-Known Woman in the Country's Premier Prison, Eastern State Penitentiary, 1831," *Pennsylvania History* 67, no. 3 (2000): 361–75; and Daniel E. Williams, "'The Horrors of This Far-Famed Penitentiary': Discipline, Defiance, and Death during Ann Carson's Incarcerations in Philadelphia's Walnut Street Prison," in *Buried Lives: Incarcerated in Early America*, ed. Michele Lise Tarter and Richard Bell (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 203–30. For women's experiences in the Philadelphia Almshouse, see Jacqueline Cahif, "'Those Insolent Hardened Husseys Go on Dispensing All Rule and Order Here': Women with Venereal Disease in the Philadelphia Almshouse," in *Buried Lives*, ed. Tarter and Bell, 85–105.
 12. W. David Lewis, "The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825–1845," *New York History* (July 1961): 220–21, 222, 229, 231.
 13. L. Mara Dodge, "'One female prisoner is of more trouble than twenty males': Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835–1896," *Journal of Social History* 32, no. 4 (1999): 909–12.
 14. Wallace Shugg, *A Monument to Good Intentions: The Story of the Maryland Penitentiary, 1804–1995* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2000), 15, 18, 27.
 15. "Roberts Vaux to Mary Waln Wistar," n.d., Vaux Family Papers, MS 684, Series I, Box 5, Folder 13, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (hereafter HSP).
 16. In reality, the concept of total isolation had a detrimental effect on many prisoners. Cases of alleged insanity or temporary mental disturbances litter the journals of Eastern State's warden. One man committed suicide by hanging himself in the cell. His death was ruled a suicide caused by insanity. Other comments by the warden in the journal suggest the issue of mental illness is rampant.

After one man broke his cell's skylight, Warden Wood recorded, "If he is not crazy he acts well." In another entry, Wood writes of an inmate, "I have some doubt of his sanity." September 1832, November 1833, January 1834, "Warden's Daily Journals, 1829–1961," RG 15, PHMC. Perhaps in order to ward off criticisms that the Pennsylvania system of isolation caused mental damage to inmates, when an inmate showed symptoms of mental disturbance after being imprisoned for a period of time, the warden and prison physicians often suggested that the inmate "had been laboring under a bent toward insanity prior to arrival" at Eastern State. Jacqueline Thibaut, "'To Pave the Way to Penitence': Prisoners and Discipline at the Eastern State Penitentiary, 1829–1835," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 106, no. 2 (1982): 214. See also Janofsky, "There is no hope for me," particularly chapter 6. As a result, many future penitentiaries in the United States were based on the New York system of silent congregate labor during the day and isolation only at night.

17. Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont, *On the Penitentiary System in The United States and Its Application in France*, trans. Francis Lieber (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1833), 2. For more information on the rise of the penitentiary in addition to Mark Kann's *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy* and Jennifer Graber's *Furnace of Affliction*, see Mark Colvin, *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs: Social Theory and the History of Punishment in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Thomas Blomberg and Karol Lucken, *American Penology: A History of Control* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000); Thomas Dumm, *Democracy and Punishment: Disciplinary Origins of the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Michael S. Hindus, *Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767–1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Adam Jay Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary: Prisons and Punishment in Early America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* (New York: Penguin, 1978); David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2000); Andrew Skotnicki, *Religion and the Development of the American Penal System* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000).

For works specifically on Pennsylvania prisons, see Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue*; Janofsky, "There is no hope for me"; Harry Elmer Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania: A Study in American Social History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1927); Negley K. Teeters, *The Cradle of the Penitentiary: The Walnut Street Jail at Philadelphia, 1773–1835* (Philadelphia: Sponsored by the Prison Society, 1955); Negley K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787–1937, Formerly the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Misery of Public Prisons* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1937); Negley K. Teeters and John Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill: The Separate System of Penal Discipline, 1829–1913* (New York: Published for Temple University Publications by New York University Press, 1957); and Simon P. Newman and Billy G. Smith, "Incarcerated Innocents: Inmates, Conditions, and Survival Strategies in Philadelphia's Almshouse and Jail," 60–84, and Jennifer Janofsky, "'Hopelessly Hardened': The Complexities of Penitentiary Discipline at Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary," 106–23, in *Buried Lives*, ed. Tarter and Bell, 60–84 and 106–23 respectively.

18. Tocqueville and Beaumont, *On the Penitentiary System*, 5.

19. Women's resistance in the state penitentiaries and county prisons argues against the social control theory of prisons set forth by Michel Foucault, Michael Ignatieff, and David Rothman of the 1970s. Michel Foucault argues that in the nineteenth century a shift in punishment occurred, focusing on the reformation of the soul as opposed to physical punishment of the body. He argues that the goal of this shift in punishment was "not to punish less, but to punish better . . . to punish with more universality and necessity." While the prison, according to Foucault, "marks the institutionalization of the power to punish," his idea of a carceral society spread the issue of discipline and control beyond the prison walls to other elements of society, such as armies or even schools. Furthermore, these institutions were to create "docile bodies," bodies that were "subjected and practiced." Through these "complete and austere" or total institutions, the individual was rendered docile. In the case of Pennsylvania's female inmates, many refused to become the docile bodies Foucault had predicted. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 82, 130, 138, 293, and 235. See also Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain*, and David Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, works that also subscribe to the social control argument for prisons. One only has to scan the records for the state's penitentiaries and county prisons to see that resistance to prison discipline was common by women as well as men. See also Janofsky, "There is no hope for me" and "Hopelessly Hardened" for many examples of prisoner resistance specifically at Eastern State Penitentiary.
20. George W. Smith, *A Defence of the System of Solitary Confinement of Prisoners Adopted by the State of Pennsylvania: with Remarks on the Origin, Progress and Extension of this Species of Prison Discipline* (Philadelphia: E. G. Dorsey, 1833), 21.
21. McElwee, *Concise history of the Eastern Penitentiary*, 8; Job R. Tyson, *Essay on the Penal Law of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Published by the Law Academy, Mifflin and Parry, 1827), 58.
22. Tyson, *Essay on the Penal Law*, 59, 58. For a detailed architectural plan of the penitentiary in Philadelphia, see John Haviland, *A description of Haviland's Design for the New Penitentiary, Now Erecting near Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Robert Desilver, 1824). This pamphlet provides more specific dimensions and features used in the penitentiary construction.
23. McElwee, *Concise history of the Eastern Penitentiary*, 8.
24. *Acts of the General Assembly relating to the Eastern State Penitentiary and to the New Prisons of the City and County of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J. W. Allen, 1831), 15–16. The records regarding the procedures of Eastern State Penitentiary are much more copious than those for Western State, resulting in a much more detailed description of daily life in the Philadelphia Penitentiary.
25. *Ibid.*, 13. It is striking that some sources acknowledge the presence of female inmates, while other descriptions use solely the male pronoun. While the female population remained consistently smaller than the male population in both state penitentiaries, the descriptions leaning toward using male pronouns make it appear that female inmates were an afterthought in the prison procedures.
26. It is unclear whether these women were convicted of voluntary or involuntary manslaughter, since the prison records only note manslaughter. Looking at the penal code for Pennsylvania, voluntary manslaughter held the punishment of imprisonment at hard labor for no more than ten years, and involuntary manslaughter was punished by imprisonment at hard labor for no more than two years. It can be deduced, then, that Rogers and Johnson would have committed voluntary manslaughter, and Hinson and Anderson, with a sentence of two years, could have been convicted of either voluntary or involuntary manslaughter. *Report of the Commissioners on the Penal Code, with the Accompanying Documents, read in the Senate, January 4, 1828* (Harrisburg: S. C. Stambaugh, 1828), 122.

27. "Descriptive Registers, 1829–1903," PHMC. During the period 1836 to 1858, admission numbers to Eastern State Penitentiary were as follows: 2,547 white males, or 77.6 percent of the male population, 734 "colored" males or 22.4 percent of the male population, 101 white females or 49.5 percent of the female population, 103 "colored" females or 50.5 percent of the female population. From "PAS Series V—Miscellaneous, Statistics of Black Crime in Philadelphia, 1859," *Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers*, Series 5.10, HSP. Slavery, Abolition, and Social Justice Database, <http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk/Contents/DocumentDetailsSearch.aspx?documentid=262987&prevPos=262987&previous=3&vpath=searchresults&searchmode=true&pi=1> (accessed January 26, 2012).
28. The fact that the only four women incarcerated in the penitentiary were central to the investigation raises the issue of prisoner agency. Because the prison records are written from the keepers' and reformers' perspectives, the documents do not indicate that these four women manipulated the employees into receiving their special privileges. Suggesting this in the records would indicate a failure of the prison system to control the inmates. The written records make it seem that the inmates were treated more like pawns of prison officials as opposed to having power over their own imprisonment. At the same time, however, it is entirely possible that the women did manipulate the system in some way, but that the details of the manipulation never made their way into the written records. Even if they did not manipulate the system to get this special treatment, the women likely would not have complained about their lenient treatment, and used their privileges to resist prison protocols. L. Mara Dodge suggests, in her study of female inmates in Illinois, that "women prisoners were well aware of the ways in which their presence disrupted penal discipline, and they often deliberately exploited that disruption" using a variety of resistance strategies. L. Mara Dodge, *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind: A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835–2000* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 30. The female inmates in Pennsylvania's state penitentiaries could very well fit into this description considering the numerous, albeit sometimes subtle, ways of resisting the severe disciplinary measures of the penal institutions.
29. McElwee, *Concise history of Eastern Penitentiary*, 172–73, 184. For a more specific account of Ann Hinson, see Patrick, "Ann Hinson," 361–75.
30. McElwee, *Concise history of Eastern Penitentiary*, 190. It was well established in the testimony of the investigation that there was venereal disease present among the employees and that acts of a sexual nature were occurring on prison grounds. What is unclear, due to a silence in the records, is whether inmates were sexually exploited during their incarceration.
31. *Ibid.*, 193–94.
32. The duties of inspectors included weekly visits to prisons where they were to "speak to each person confined therein out of the presence of any of the persons employed therein; shall listen to any complaints that may be made of oppression or ill conduct of the persons so employed, examine into the truth thereof, and proceed therein when the complaint is well founded." *Acts of the General Assembly*, 12.
33. It should be noted that it is also possible that Rogers may have been trying to manipulate Coxie in the hopes of reducing her sentence or receiving extra privileges for her troubles.
34. See Janofsky, "There is no hope for me," 166–67.
35. Dorothea Dix, *Remarks on Prison and Prison Discipline in the United States* (Philadelphia: Joseph Kite, 1845), 60.
36. Thomas Larcombe, "Volume A: Admissions 1830–1839 (#20–1124)," Series I, *State Penitentiary for the Eastern District Papers*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia (hereafter APS).

37. Ibid.
38. Thomas Larcombe, "Volume D: Admissions, 1845–1850 (#1941–2600)," APS. Mary Ann Rogers was twenty-five at her admission in 1845, was from New Jersey, and was noted as having a swarthy complexion. "Descriptive Registers, 1829–1903."
39. Reformers and prison employees tend to dominate the written records of the institutions, and rules prohibiting letter writing to and from inmates reduces the chance of finding their own words. Scholars are left to glean information about the individuals' experiences through the mediated voices of reformers and prison officials, with the inmate voice being heard only rarely.
40. These few women discussed here were not the only inmates to write about their incarceration. Jennifer Graber argues that former inmates of New York's penitentiary systems shaped their stories of incarceration using the "trope of redemptive suffering" not only to give meaning to their imprisonment—that they had to suffer bodily pain to reform their character—but also to criticize the harsh nature of discipline in the penitentiaries and the prison staff. Jennifer Graber, "Engaging the Trope of Redemptive Suffering: Inmate Voices in Antebellum Prison Debates," *Pennsylvania History* 79, no. 2 (2012): 211. See also Caleb Smith, "Henry Hawser's Fate: Eastern State Penitentiary and the Birth of Prison Literature," in *Buried Lives*, ed. Tarter and Bell, 231–58.
41. One prison record noted that Julia Wilt she was aged forty years at the time of her confinement, had a light complexion with blue-gray eyes and black hair. "Miscellaneous Descriptive Books, 1829–1842," PHMC. Another register adds that Julia could only read, was a servant, got intoxicated occasionally, and had left her husband. "Descriptive Registers, 1829–1903."
42. *An Account of Julia Moore, A Penitent Female, who died in the Eastern Penitentiary of Philadelphia, in the year 1843*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Joseph and William Kite, 1844), 4. There is a discrepancy in Moore's age between the pamphlet and the descriptive registers. I believe the pamphlet made Moore younger in an effort to engage the readers by transforming her into a more sympathetic character.
43. Ibid., 18–19.
44. Richard Vaux, *Brief Sketch of the Origin and History of the State Penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: McLaughlin Brothers, 1872), 36, 50.
45. *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Ed. Harrington and Geo. D. Haswell, 1845), 22.
46. Francis Lieber, *Letter to Mr. Barclay, Honorary Secretary of the Philadelphia Prison Society, September 18, 1843*, reprinted in *Joseph Adshead, Prisons and Prisoners* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1845), 116–17. Again, the discussion of letter writing in this case raises the question of penitentiary policy and what actually occurred in the prison. These two instances indicate that the original act prohibiting writing and receiving letters was not actually upheld. For the original interview that Charles Dickens had with the young woman, see chapter 7 in Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).
47. While it is unclear exactly who this woman is, we do know the three women Dickens and Lieber are discussing. Their names are Louisa Harman, Elizabeth Thompson, and Ann Richards. All are young, either teenagers or in their early twenties upon reception, and all are African American servants. They were pardoned for their crimes in 1844, less than five years after their arrival in 1839. "Descriptive Registers, 1829–1903." A letter from the warden, George Thompson, to the governor,

David Porter, asks on behalf of the "Ladies Prison Society" for the pardon of these three women. According to the warden, the benevolent society vouched for them and promised, once they were released, to find them suitable arrangements outside the prison in order to help them avoid a life of future crime. The governor consented. "Eastern State Penitentiary Outgoing Correspondence, 1839–1850," Thompson Family Papers, MG 654, Series III, Box 5, Folder 27, HSP.

48. While it appears that at Eastern State letter writing was allowed by 1844, in the 1848 Annual Report of Western State Penitentiary, the moral instructor writes, "The privilege of corresponding by letter with absent friends once in three months, has been granted to the prisoners during the year. This favor was forfeited by any violation of the rules of the prison. Whilst then it contributed to make better the heart of the outcast convict, by the softening and humanizing intercourse with beloved objects, it also aided in the preservation of order and good conduct within the prison." *Report of the Board of Inspectors of the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, for the Year 1848, with the Accompanying Documents* (Pittsburgh: Johnson and Stockton, 1849), 20. It appears that prison officials were beginning to see the ameliorating effects on behavior that written correspondence could have on inmates and that cutting them off entirely from the outside world was not necessarily a good plan.
49. "Elizabeth Velora Elwell Correspondence," April 18, 1862, Series III, Folder 1, *State Penitentiary for the Eastern District Papers* (hereafter Elwell Correspondence). Unfortunately, there is little context for these letters, yet they are invaluable because they represent some of the rarest sources, handwritten letters from a nineteenth-century female inmate. Elwell was arrested for larceny of store merchandise and property from the U.S. mail. She was sentenced to eighteen months, entered Eastern State on December 10, 1861, and was discharged on June 10, 1863. Information on Elwell from Elwell Correspondence, Series III, Folder 2.
50. Elwell Correspondence, April 22 and 25, 1862.
51. Ibid., n.d.
52. The notorious Ann Carson also had her story told through a ghostwriter, Mary Clarke. Two publications, *The History of the Celebrated Mrs. Ann Carson*, published in 1822, and *The Memoirs of the Celebrated and Beautiful Mrs. Ann Carson*, published in 1838, were shaped specifically with the intention of targeting a public audience for the purposes of making money. These were scandalous, shocking narratives, creating a persona for Ann Carson that went from being a "wronged woman" in the 1822 publication to being a "simply bad" criminal in 1838. Carson's crimes and exploits were used by Clarke to garner an audience for her written work and to further her career. See Branson, *Dangerous to Know*, 105, 130–32.
53. Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy*, 15.
54. *Acts of the General Assembly*, 23.
55. *First Annual Report of the Board of Inspectors of the Philadelphia County Prison* (Harrisburg, PA: J.M.G. Lescure, 1848), 6. At this point, the Walnut Street Jail also ceased its function as the county jail.
56. By an inspector, "In and Out of the County Prison," *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* 12, no. 2 (1857): 64.
57. "PAS Series V—Miscellaneous, Statistics of Black Crime in Philadelphia, 1859." Presumably these numbers were calculated for those who were sentenced to Moyamensing, not those necessarily incarcerated for vagrancy or inability to pay court fines.

58. Coates argues that it is not the “most wretched and most exposed to hardships of our population” who are sentenced to Eastern State, suggesting perhaps a slight difference in class between those sent to the penitentiary and those committed to the county prison. Benjamin H. Coates, *On the Effects of Secluded and Gloomy Imprisonment on Individuals of the African Variety of Mankind, in the Production of Disease* (Philadelphia: John C. Clark, 1843), 94. It seems plausible that the same reasoning that Coates uses for African American incarceration patterns might be applied to immigrants who committed crimes in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, finding numbers to corroborate the incarceration rates of individuals who recently immigrated to Philadelphia is all but impossible. A glance at the surnames of Moyamensing’s prisoners suggests that many could have been recent immigrants, particularly of Irish descent. Because many women in the prison records were committed for vagrancy, drunkenness, and disorderly conduct, it seems that regardless of race or ethnicity, women of the lowest social standing were imprisoned in Moyamensing. See also “Commitment Dockets, Female Department” and “Prisons Convict Docket, Female,” RG 38, Philadelphia Prisons System, Philadelphia City Archives (hereafter PCA). Imprisoning vagrants was a common occurrence in late eighteenth-century Philadelphia as well. See Newman and Smith, “Incarcerated Innocents,” in *Buried Lives*, ed. Tarter and Bell, 61.
59. Pennsylvania Prison Society. *Annual Report of the Acting Committee of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons January 1, 1833* (Philadelphia, 1833), 6.
60. Ibid.
61. Dorothea Dix, *Memorial Soliciting a State Hospital for the Insane: Submitted to the Legislature of Pennsylvania, February 3, 1845* (Harrisburg: J.M.G. Lescure, 1845), 44, 45.
62. Unfortunately with these sources, the records only give glimpses into the life of the county prison for short periods of time making chronological comparisons all but impossible.
63. “Prison Diary, Female Department, 1850–1860,” March 21, 1850, RG 38, PCA.
64. Ibid., April 2 and 11, 1850; May 20 and 30, 1851; February 15, 1855. Often women who were put in the dark cell only stayed one day. Lydia O’Connor, a black woman who was sentenced for thirty days beginning on March 30, 1850, was put in the dark cell for “insolence and abuse” on April 11 and was returned to her regular cell the next day after promising to obey the rules. “Commitment Docket, Female Department, July 1849 to November 1851,” RG 38, PCA. It is worth noting that it appears that the “strapping” was not a whipping, but actually a type of restraints used to hold down inmates.
65. “Prison Diary,” April 29 and June 8, 1850. Martha Russell, who broke her furniture on April 29, 1850, was a white woman imprisoned for disorderly conduct, and Susan Barber, alias Kelly, who drew a knife on the keeper was incarcerated many times in the 1850s for assault and battery, disorderly conduct, and breaking the peace. “Commitment Docket, Female Department, July 1849 to November 1851.” Martha Russell spent more time in the dark cell beginning on October 17, 1851, when she was punished “for letting the Hydrant run in her cell & using profane language.” “Prison Diary,” October 17, 1851.
66. “Prison Diary,” April 12, 1850 (emphasis in original). Catharine Jordan was imprisoned for disturbing the peace and was sent to prison on July 23, 1849. “Commitment Docket, Female Department, July 1849 to November 1851.”
67. “Commitment Docket, Female Department, July 1849 to November 1851”; “Prison Diary,” September 24 and 25, December 4, 1850; January 22, 1851. Chaining was apparently a common

- practice to punish insubordinate offenders in the nineteenth-century penitentiaries. See Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain*, 198. Furthermore, strapping appears to be another form of restraint used on refractory prisoners.
68. "Prison Diary," March 5, 1851. Wagstaff, a white woman, was imprisoned on June 13, 1850, for larceny. "Commitment Docket, Female Department, July 1849 to November 1851."
 69. "Prison Diary," August 29, 1851; February 3, March 13, 15, 16, April 10, August 26, November 19, and December 4, 1852; April 8, 1853. For further sources on issues of punishment in the Pennsylvania system, particularly in Eastern State, see William C. Kashatus, "Punishment, Penitence and Reform: Eastern State Penitentiary and the Controversy over Solitary Confinement" *Pennsylvania Heritage* 25, no. 1 (1999): 30–39; and Thibaut, "To Pave the Way to Penitence," 187–222.
 70. Nineteenth-century observers often noted that female inmates had a tendency to be considered "incorrigible." Mark Kann notes that officials in some states, including "Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, and Indiana," avoided sending women to penitentiaries because of this trait. Instead, the women were sent to county prisons. In New York prison inspectors were told that women "were 'very refractory' as well as unproductive." Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy*, 193. See also Lucia Zedner, "Wayward Sisters: The Prison for Women," 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, 1995), 348. Twentieth-century studies have also shown that female inmates tended to be troublesome, even at times more so than their male counterparts. See Jocelyn M. Pollock, *Sex and Supervision: Guarding Male and Female Inmates* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 28–31, 57–58.
 71. "Prison Diary," December 2, 1854, and August 26, 1856.
 72. *Ibid.*, August 2, 3, 4, 1855, and August 12, 1856.
 73. *Ibid.*, October 29 and November 29, 1851.
 74. *Ibid.*, August 12, 1856. Caroline Erwin was imprisoned for vagrancy on January 22, 1856. "Commitment Docket, August 1854 to December 1856," RG 38, PCA.
 75. *Ibid.* November 6, 1854. It is difficult to identify this particular Mary Smith in the inmate registers. There are multiple Mary Smiths listed, many who were incarcerated multiple times in the 1850s for crimes such as disorderly conduct and breaking the peace. While the Mary Smith in this example may be one of these entries, there is no way to know for sure which Mary Smith this woman might be.
 76. *Ibid.*
 77. "Prison Diary," August 26 and 28, 1856. Like Mary Smith, Kate Murray is difficult to identify in the commitment dockets. Multiple Kate and Catherine Murrays litter the registers. Most of these individuals were imprisoned for drunk and disorderly behavior and vagrancy, suggesting a life on the streets.
 78. Dorothea Dix, in her crusade to improve prisons and help the mentally ill, made it a goal to have a state hospital established so that the insane that were locked in prisons could be removed to a facility that specialized in caring for those who suffered from mental illness. See Dix, *Memorial Soliciting a State Hospital for the Insane*.
 79. "Punishment Ledger, 1839–1841," RG 38, PCA.

80. It is worth considering that the use of more severe punishments on increasingly violent inmates may be an overall reflection of the nation's sectional conflict, which also became more violent in the 1850s.
81. *Williamsport Grit*, April 1931.
82. *Sullivan County Democrat*, November 23, 1858.
83. Secretary of the Commonwealth, *Report of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, relative to the County Prisons of the State* (Harrisburg, PA: E. Guyer, 1839), 6, 8, 17.
84. Dix, *Memorial Soliciting a State Hospital for the Insane*, 11, 15, 23.