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The Rhetoric of Second Chance: The Invention of Ethos For An Ex-Offender

By

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A Thesis Approved on

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Dedication

To Sally, my mother and master.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express sincere appreciation to the Department of English for their support and especially to my thesis chair, Professor David Coogan. His vast reserve of patience, knowledge, guidance and support during this project has enabled me to develop an understanding and appreciation for the discipline. Also, I wish to thank my thesis committee members for their interest and dedication to my work and for their valid contributions to making this work a success.

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I especially and humbly want to acknowledge the support and love I receive from my dear family. My mom, Sally, has been my biggest cheerleader since the day I was born. Her love and selfless nature is my inspiration. She is my rock. My father, Lamin, who taught me how to soar. My brothers, Lamin Jr. and Sultan; both of you are the apples of my eyes.

While I cannot mention the names of the ex-offender who participated in this study, I want to state that I was astounded by their honesty and humbling spirit. I look forward to working with and writing about this community for years to come.

And finally, to God, my Maker and Teacher, who according to the book of Jeremiah 1:5, knew me before I was formed in my mother's womb; therefore, He ordained my steps, which in this case directed me to study writing and rhetoric, even though I am the least qualified for the task. There is absolutely no way I could have completed this study and write this thesis without Your Divine support and direction. I bow to You God and say "Papa God, Tenki," (Daddy God, Thank You).

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Abstract

The Rhetoric of Second Chance: The Invention of Ethos For An Ex-Offender

By Modu L.A. Fofana-Kamara, MA

For many, literacy is reading and writing- a critical tool for ethos construction. But for a marginalized group of ex-offenders, former prison inmates, who were not accustomed to reading and writing as an agent for character invention, the ability to employ literacy and to construct ethos was a challenging and almost unsuccessful attempt. I discuss in this thesis a community-writing project I designed as a graduate student and my partnership with Boaz & Ruth, a local faith-based non-profit organization working with ex-offenders. Through the collaboration I facilitated writing skills workshop, which objective was to have the ex-offenders to write personal narratives. The writing exercises enabled me to examine implications at work when a marginalized groups like the ex-offenders endeavor to invent ethos through the ideology literacy, fomenting rhetorical dialogues and contended with public discourses.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011

Major Director: David Coogan, Professor, English Department

Introduction

It is vital for people on the margins of dominant discourses to establish ethos in order to access and participate in public matters. By discourse, I am referring to Wayne Campbell Peck, Lorraine Haggins and Linda Flower's description for the word, which they reference as the "available roles, motives, and strategies that support a transaction" tied into the use of language "develop[ed] to address differences based on ethnic, cultural, educational, and economic backgrounds" (203). Thus, their description for discourse indicates ethos construction as the gateway to identifying and participating in public discourses. That is, the encapsulation of ethos construction becomes the launching pad for people on the margins to observe dominant discourses, to gain agency (the access and control over a discourse), and to foment rhetorical dialogues suitable for the ongoing dialogues at the center of society.

According to James Collins and Richard Blot in "Literacy and Literacies," literacy seems to "envelop our lives" (5). For Collins and Blot, the contemporary literacy is not only defined as school or formal education but also vernacular, cultural, and computer literacies. This definition of literacy holds cultural and historical contexts as the source through which literacies are developed. By pluralizing literacy, the nineteenth century notion of school literacy as the primary and narrow path to success is then dethroned (Collins and Blot). In B. V. Street's book, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, he challenges literacy as a singular concept by arguing that the meaning of literacy cannot be separated from the social institutions in which it is practiced and acquired (1). Street's argument, as

well as Collins and Blot's assertion of literacies, shifts the acquisition of knowledge from an exclusive approach (formal education) to the more appropriate and inclusive term *literacies*, which includes culture and other facets.

Street's claim for literacies is compelling. However, in pluralizing literacies, I believe that we should all acknowledge that the acquisition of cultural or vernacular literacies alone would not qualify people on the margins of dominant discourses, to participate in public matters. Therefore, I believe that the acquisition of school literacy should be heavily emphasized, because it is this form of literacy that distinguishes insiders from outsiders in dominant discourses. I am not suggesting that someone who aspires to participate in dominant discourses should abandon cultural or vernacular literacies for school literacy. What I am proposing is that dominant literacy is the primary tool needed for marginalized groups to participate in public discourses. I say this because I believe that an understanding of literacy would enable people on the margins to contend with dominant literacy and appropriate other literacies to design, present, and articulate rhetorical issues.

Also, I believe that an understanding of literacy would enlighten people who could be unaccustomed to the concept of *ethos*, the development of a credible character, to understand the principle of ethos with the hopes of composing one. Ethos is a Greek term which means character. Aristotle developed and defined the establishment of ethos as the character's use of good sense, good moral character, and goodwill towards audience or society. In

essence ethos has a sacrificial connotation, meaning the development of credibility is not for personal gain but for the greater good of the society.

Christine Alfano and Alyssa J. O'Brien, authors of a first year composition textbook, *Envision in Depth: Reading, Writing and Researching Arguments*, best define ethos in chapter two of their book as the construction of an argument in which the writer uses "power to persuade" the audience depending on his/her credibility" (37). Alfano and O'Brien's definition of ethos depicts ethos as a powerful tool that the writer could employ in writing good college paper. For them, a student who exhibits ethos conducts the appropriate research and applies the correct rhetorical appeal (referring to the two other rhetorical appeals, logos and pathos) to persuade the audience. The idea of ethos as described by Alfano and O'Brien requires students to master the art of persuasion as it establishes the platform for packaging the self for service to society.

Drawing from the works of theorists like Street and Alfano and O'Brien, I will argue in this thesis that the role of literacy, meaning reading and writing, is the power tool for inventing ethos. The basis of my claim will be demonstrated through the discussion of a writing skills class that I designed and executed as a graduate student. The goal of the class was to teach basic writing skills to ex-offenders, former prison inmates, who were enrolled in a transitional re-entry program. I partnered with Boaz and Ruth (B&R), a local faith-based, non-profit organization whose vision is to provide the ex-offenders a second chance to make it right with themselves, their families, and the community. My partnership with B&R allowed me to work with remarkable people who were willing to go

through B&R's program to demonstrate to society that though they have paid the price for the crime in prison, they still go through such programs to indicate their willingness to learn and comply with society's standards. In a way, this demonstrates the ex-offenders good sense towards society in that they are willing to reorient themselves with society's expectations.

My partnership with the organization started through a community writing course which required students to design a community outreach project. According to the course syllabus, students should employ service learning theorists such as Ellen Cushman, Paula Mathieu, and Linda Flower to chart an inquiry that identifies a community need, addresses the need, and measures the outcome of the project. Identifying a community was difficult at first, because I wanted to work with a community where I would utilize my both my faith and academic experiences. After a brief discussion with David Coogan, the professor who taught the course, he briefed me on B&R's project and I offered to work with them because the organization implements Christian beliefs in its curriculum.

Furthermore, I opted to partner with B&R because I thought I would offer firsthand experience to the success of employing literacy as a key construct ethos to participate in dominant discourses. As a Sierra Leonean, my culture treats literacy as the key to breaking the chains of poverty as well as social and political oppressions. Therefore, I thought that my testimony would motivate the men and women who enrolled in my writing skills class to envision literacy (not disputing cultural and other facet of literacies) as a major component in their re-entry process. I thought that the ex-offenders would gladly embrace my writing

skills class because I thought they already understood the power of literacy since they are Americans and American is a progressive country that high values education. I was wrong. The fault in my assumption was not that the ex-offenders did not understand literacy or could not read and write, but a majority of them resisted writing because they declared that they hate writing, the process is difficult, and they could not see how writing related to ethos invention. At first I thought, how could they not see that writing is directly linked to ethos construction. I believe that writing is vital, not just for writing their personal narratives, but for filling out job and apartment applications but also for accounting for their years in jail/prison, as well as their criminal record once they check the felon box on an application.

My partnership with B&R was intended to last for six weeks; however, it was extended to almost two years. During the first six weeks session, I identified freewriting exercises as a method that encouraged the ex-offenders to experiment with writing. They wrote compelling narratives that confirmed the use of writing as a tool for ethos invention. Indeed, the time spent in research and working with the ex-offenders enabled me to conclude that literacy, meaning school education, is an important tool that would facilitate and advance people on margins of society to move and participate in public discourses. The project's impact did not only transform the lives of the ex-offenders, but it also provided me with the space to catalyze a contingent that is often looked upon in the American culture as the other. I have never been incarcerated, but my work with the ex-offenders has allowed me to articulate rhetorical dilemmas that ex-

offenders or other marginalized groups could encounter as they strive to move to the center with only cultural or other facets of literacies.

The success of the writing skills class was not only demonstrated in the ex-offenders writing compelling personal narratives, but they cultivated skills such as the writing of rough drafts and multiple revisions as life applicable skills. One ex-offender later concluded that writing is like B&R; it provides second chance opportunities to make things right. I agreed with to this ex-offender's equation of writing to B&R, and thought that it was a compelling equation because it illustrates that writing, just as with second chances and the invention of ethos, is an ongoing process.

In fact, B&R's premise is to design educational programs that would empower the ex-offenders with diverse skills in writing, computer, social, and financial literacies. The acquisition of these skills would empower the ex-offenders to develop and establish themselves as functional, responsible, and accountable citizens. The educational programs or life labs, as they call them, ask B&R to employ the ex-offenders as apprentices in staffing positions. I believe this employment forces the ex-offender to go beyond classroom observation and practices to experience real life situations. This is the organization's attempt to position the ex-offenders to relearn and reaffirm the importance for punctuality (going to work on time), balancing a cash register, and to acquire customer service and people skills.

Thus, I believe that the success of B&R's program centers on the organization's ability to encourage ex-offenders, who, according to their

individual criminal records, exhibit no signs of trustworthiness, to latch on to the organization's ethos and to use it as a springboard to build a credible and reputable character. In fact, the founder and CEO of B&R, Martha Rollins, is a firm believer of second chances. Through her Christian background, she believes in forgiveness and providing space for the person or people forgiven to experience transformation. As a matter of fact, B&R's vision, according to the organization's website, is to "rebuild lives and communities through relationships, training, transitional jobs and economic revitalization"

(<http://www.boazandruth.com>). This suggested that Rollins' aim is not only to provide the ex-offenders a second chances, but also to empower and encourage them by rebuilding the lives of the individuals and the community. Rollins' approach of second chances prevents the ex-offenders from making the same mistake and according to her, this approach lowers the local recidivism rate.

Furthermore, I will argue that the work of B&R complements ancient rhetoric by using the program as a platform for the directives of ethos construction. As I mentioned earlier, ethos, according to Aristotelian rhetoric, is the prime factor for identifying and constructing estimable personas. In fact, in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines *rhetoric* as the "faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (1355-56). In this, Aristotle's claim positions ethos as "the most effective means of persuasion" in that it provides the space for contingent members to construct arguments based on shared values (1355-56).

Thus, I believe the premise of B&R's program is to employ principles of ethos construction as the fundamental approach to transform and rebuild the lives of the ex-offenders and the Highland Park community. To better understand B&R's approach to the employment of ethos, it is best to examine Aristotelian rhetoric, particularly the study of ethos. As suggested by Aristotelian rhetoric, a *rhetor* should master the art persuasion because it provides the techniques, the schemes, and the tropes required to construct compelling arguments. For this reason, it is imperative that the rhetor, while composing the credible person, master and deploy the common language of a particular discourse in reference to the contingent truth. This notion opposes the assertion of absolute certainty about truth, as truth itself is subjected to a contingent's definition. For it is through the lens of uncertainty, opinions, and educated guesses, that contingent truth emerges and the operation of dialectic would allow a rhetor to invent credibility and trustworthiness to accompany the presenting persona. Having said this, I believe the Aristotelian triad of proofs (good-sense, good-character, and goodwill) ranks the construction of ethos as the lead element used by rhetors to establish a connection between the argument and the audience.

As mentioned earlier, I became interested in partnering with B&R because of the organization's success stories and their attempt to reduce the recidivism rate in the Richmond. Although the organization has an overwhelming archive of tape-recorded testimonies to confirm and commend B&R's outstanding work in the lives of the individual ex-offenders and the entire community of Highland Park, it was through my work with ex-offenders that I discovered the usefulness

of literacy in ethos construction. The tapes could have proven this finding as well, but the emphasis of my project, which was to motivate the ex-offenders to write their personal narratives, disclosed the resistance I encountered when I invited the ex-offenders to experiment with writing as a process for ethos construction.

Thus, the work of J. Elspeth Stuckey and other Marxist scholars writing about the politics of literacy informed my theoretical exploration of the resistance. In her book, *The Violence of Literacy*, Stuckey explains that over the years the American system of education had continuously encountered revolutionary crises, which in some cases had influenced the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. She claims that in the turn of the twentieth century, American society linked the notion of equality and literacy, suggesting that literacy (the process of learning and acquiring knowledge) is accessible to all Americans, including immigrants. She goes on to identify this emerging concept as a branch of the American Dream by arguing that

We [Americans] believe our society provides equal opportunity for all and promises success to those who work hard to achieve it. We believe the key to achievement is education, and we believe the heart of education is literacy. (vii)

Thus, the notion that literacy and success are binary components coupled to empower the people, seeped into public discourses across contingents.

Agreeing with Stuckey, I believe that the acquisition of formal education is, though not only limited to, success acquisition, but it also facilitates the process for deconstructing rhetorical stigmas. Stuckey's compelling claim, which pins

success to hard work, is not only the sentiment for the American Dream, but I strongly believe it originated from the Aristotelian rhetoric for the construction and application of ethos, a connection that Stuckey did not link in her argument. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle's understanding of happiness suggests an extension of the contemporary interpretation of success and accomplishment.

We may define happiness as prosperity combined with virtue; or as independence of life; or as the secure enjoyment of the maximum of pleasure; or as a good condition of property and body, together with the power of guarding one's property and body and making use of them. That happiness is one or more of these things, pretty well everybody agrees. (1360)

Looking at Aristotle's definition, I believe society's claim for education, that it is the key to success, is a combination of literacy and Aristotle's understanding of happiness. With this in mind, access to literacy (or *formal education*) then becomes the preliminary step in constructing ethos. Having said this, the initial goal of my project, which was to facilitate a writing workshop for the ex-offenders to write the accompanying narratives to their individual reentry journey, shifted to the teaching of basic writing skills, reintroducing literacy through the writing, and inviting the ex-offenders to contend with and appropriate dominant discourses as a resource for re-inventing ethos. Through this strategy, they were able to deconstruct former identities as they tapped into B&R's vision.

In a similar argument relating to the American concept of literacy, Deborah Brandt, in "Sponsors of Literacy," links the economic benefits of literacy as

determined by a specific contingent. For example, the evolution of literacy suggests that an understanding or a misreading of the ideology of literacy could result in a revolutionary movement, which could lead to a reformation for the ideology or a rejection of its beliefs. Brandt puts it this way:

I do not wish to overlook the very different economic, political, and education systems within which U.S. literacy was developed. But where we find the sponsoring of literacy, it will be useful to look for its function within larger political and economic arenas. Literacy, like land, is a valued commodity in this economy, a key resource in gaining profit and edge. This value helps to explain, of course, the lengths to which people will go to secure literacy for themselves or their children. But it also explains why the powerful work so persistently to conscript and ration the powers of literacy. The competition to harness literacy, to manage, measure, teach, and exploit it, has intensified throughout the century. (558-9)

Brandt's characterization of literacy as a commodity mirrors Stuckey's claim that literacy is the key to success. Therefore, without the correct appropriation of literacy, it is unlikely for a marginalized group like the ex-offenders to construct ethos leading to happiness. Believing that happiness or success is the expected end of the ex-offenders enrolled in B&R's program, I believe it is pivotal for an ex-offender to acquire the fundamental principles of literacy so as to utilize them as the prerequisite to reentering and reconstructing and reclaiming the responsible citizen character.

To demonstrate these claims in Chapters 1 and 2, I will examine the evolution of ethos by tracing classical to contemporary theories. Advancing this discussion, I will posit the formation of ethos as a transforming instrument that marginalized groups, such as ex-offenders, could appropriate in the movement towards the center. Moving forward, in Chapter 3, I will argue that the practice of literacy, referring to the acquisition of formal education and its expressive nature, values the development of cognitive skills. By engaging Stuckey and other Marxist readings of literacy, I will also illustrate in Chapter 3 how the ex-offenders wrestled with the writing project and the politics of literacy as they initially refused to embrace writing as process for inventing ethos.

Adding to this discussion, Chapter 4 is an analysis of the project, which will illustrate how the ex-offenders reconciled and employed writing as a process for inventing ethos. Also, in this section, I will offer an analysis of the ex-offenders' writing samples to demonstrate how they experimented with the writing process to appropriate dominant discourses to advance knowledge and the movement towards the center. The concluding section will address a general analysis for the writing project by measuring its challenge and success to affirm the use of writing as a process that would enable marginalized people invent ethos.

Chapter I

The Development and Evolution of Ethos: The Position of Common Knowledge in the Construction of Ethos

Rhetoricians such as Sharon Crowley, Debra Hawhee, Robert J. Connors, Edward P. J. Corbett, and William M. Sattler all discuss ethos construction through an examination of ancient rhetorics. Their work suggests that when the fundamental principles of rhetoric are accurately traced, it activates a system of operation for the members of a contingent to observe and participate in public discourses. Thus the establishment of the fundamentals becomes the platform for contingent members to acquire and learn the common language.

With that said, the purpose of this section is to first define the formation of an ideology and to show its place in the literacy. To frame this argument, I will focus on Stuckey's linking ideology and literacy along with contributions from Robert Scott, Thomas Farrell, Kenneth Burke, and Walter Fisher. The common thread that runs through these theorists is they all, through inference or assertion, point to the engagement of common knowledge as a communicative tool required to accurately dissect and discuss traditional or contemporary ideologies. Additionally, their work also supports the understanding of an ideology as equally tied to ethos construction. That is, through the historical and cultural evidence of an ideology, a concept can be understood with respect to its traditional usage; on the other hand, the absence of the historical or cultural readings, an ideology can be easily misread or misappropriated.

A full commentary on the discussion of ethos as a persuasive tool is seen in Robert J. Connors and Edward P. J. Corbett's book, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. In it, Connors and Corbett define *ethos* as the ethical appeal. Their argument implies that the ethical appeal as a concept can easily be missed by a marginalized group because it is often, but not always, regarded by rhetoricians as the "hidden persuader" (77). For the ex-offenders, critiqued writing was difficult and tedious because to them, writing a personal or transformational narrative is unprofitable to the ex-offender's reentry journey. Perhaps Connors and Corbett may argue that the ex-offender's claim is a result of ethos as an invisible attribute that could only be attained through a specific training, which I believe is one of B&R's intentions.

With this in mind, it is critical for marginalized groups to access the conversation at the center, whether through cultural truths, literacy narratives, or formal education, as this could enable people on the margins to actively participate in public discourses. In Connors and Corbett's argument, they suggest that a possible lens to frame and construct ethos is by examining Aristotle's rhetoric. This is not to say that Aristotle's rhetoric is superior to the Sophists or the dialectic, because even Aristotle himself asserts, "Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectic" (1354a). Nevertheless, his rhetoric provides a system for the praxis of ethos, and even though his characterization of ethos could be seen as exclusive to the dominant (Greek citizens), it provides the space for outsiders to imitate, practice, and perfect the development of credible character.

To further their claim, Connors and Corbett assert that the construction of the ethical appeal is often the cornerstone of “rhetorical discourse, because here we deal with matters about which absolute certainty is impossible and opinions are divided” (72). Critics like Connors and Corbett who treat the construction of ethos as an advancement in formulating public discourses, posit rhetorical dialogues as the place where ideologies are shared and belief systems are constructed. As a result, the discussion of rhetoric as the art of persuasion then becomes subjective to the contingent truths.

In discussing the epistemology of rhetoric, Robert Scott in “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic,” characterizes rhetoric as the gateway to advance existing knowledge and the space to invent inquires. Because of this, Scott asserts “It would be absurd for anyone,” to enter a contingent with the presumption that he/she possesses the absolute truth required to function in that community (135). The fault in this assumption, according to Scott, is that the discovery and practice of contingent truths takes place during the discussion and appropriation of “a set of general accepted norms” (134). For this reason, emerging presumptions, if not fleshed out by observing or participating in public forums, could cloud a potential participant’s impressions about public discourses. Furthering that claim, Scott argues that if truth, which he describes as the art of persuasion, is based on a contingent’s interaction with ideologies, then rhetoric could be misused because it grants “sufferance” among participants. It provides the space for potential misconception since “men are not as they ought to be.” We are imperfect and cannot reason soundly from true premises (131). With this in mind, the art of

persuasion is thus subject to the participants in a contingent because its members have the budding liberty to use, misuse, or abuse the concept for the ethical appeal.

Linking this back to my work with B&R's ex-offenders and the B&R's vision, which operates through the ideology of second chances, affirms the organization's faith-based orientation. In fact, I believe the major link between B&R and Christianity is the principle of second chances. To understand this connection better, the Apostle Paul describes Jesus' Calvary journey as a gateway to providing second chances to all who believe and accept the message Jesus preached. According to the Apostle Paul, individuals are guaranteed a new life because "if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV).

Complementing this principle, B&R's vision, which is to rebuild and restore the lives of the ex-offenders and Highland Park community, mirrors the Apostle Paul's assertion on Jesus' conversion doctrine. That is, by participating in B&R's program, the organization provides the ex-offenders with the opportunity to obtain a second chance to rebuild their individual lives, as well as the collective life of the community. The transformed ex-offender is then able to reclaim the new man, the credible identity, by first deconstructing the criminal stigma. Thus, B&R's program offers the ex-offenders a point of access to dominant discourses in that the ex-offenders gain the opportunity to observe, experiment, and develop the required life skills to appropriate the ethical appeal.

The irony of this is that unlike Paul's claim for the miraculous and total freedom for the Christian converts, the ex-offender's reentry journey to reclaim the new man or woman is ongoing. This is due to the fact that leading agencies within the society (such as the judiciary system) hold the privilege to grant the ex-offenders total freedom that would enable them to secure a job or lease an apartment. Without these privileges, the ex-offenders' aspiration to exercise the complete rights of the land, as indicated in the United States' Constitution is limited.

Hence, the discussion of the imperfect nature of men, as Scott would say, becomes the double-edged sword that influences the ex-offenders' action for becoming a contingent participant. In this case, the ex-offenders may have to employ the dialectic as an invention to access the ideologies that are governing the policies of the Constitution. According to Scott's suggestion, this opens the space to foment dialogues to promote emerging truths (137). With this in mind, I argue, the ex-offenders' become participants of the dominant discourse when they voluntarily enrolled in B&R's reentry program. An enrollment to the program signifies the ex-offenders' attempt to conform to society's norm and to gain the agency to construct the responsible citizen. Unlike Paul's claim for the Christian converts, an enrollment to B&R's program does not guarantee the ex-offenders the check mark to total freedom. Though it equips them with possible tools to combat the daily dilemmas, there is no guarantee that society would gladly measure the ex-offenders opportunities with the equivalence to non-offenders.

An opportune moment for an ex-offender to succeed if confronted with such is to employ rhetorical appeals, particularly the ethical proof because it enables the rhetor to construct an argument that would cause the audience to rethink its initial stance. The intent of this argument is not to propose manipulation, but rather rhetorical invention. Perhaps a possible line of argument an ex-offender could construct would come from B&R's use of the commonplace topic of the second chance. Though this commonplace topic hinges on the ideology of equality, which in itself has historical baggage, nevertheless, it provides the space, though sometimes limited, for reconciliation and restoration of those on the margins of society. But to do this, they would need access to what Thomas Farrell called "social knowledge."

According to Farrell, *social knowledge* is the use of a common language or a set of belief systems within the discourse community to deploy and facilitate the deliberation of exigencies within the contingent (142). Although Stuckey did not make this reference in her argument, I believe, like Farrell, her discussion of ideology is framed from the Aristotelian understanding of ethos, which Farrell recognizes as the natural corollary of Aristotle's idealization. Farrell goes on to define this idealization as "human nature, the potential of human reason, and the norms and procedures of public decision-making" (141). Regardless of whether Stuckey and Farrell carried their individual concepts for ideology or social knowledge from Aristotle's rhetoric, it is worth noting that both arguments center the discussion of an ideology or social knowledge on human practice, which is

well-defined as the definition for ideology as the establishment of systems or ideas (Poulantzas).

Perhaps from this standpoint, it is clear to see that the ideology of literacy, which Stuckey describes as the vehicle capitalized societies such as America, uses to measure individual or contingent success and achievement. If this is accurate, then it critically elevates and presses the need to learn and acquire literacy as the prime factor for participation and membership in dominant discourses. With that said, my move to appropriate literacy as a tool to enable the ex-offenders to construct ethos, which is a part of B&R'S vision, was deliberate. Through the writing project, as well as in the other classes offered by the organization, the ex-offenders were provided with the space to envision themselves individually and collectively as interlocutors of the community as they worked alongside Rollins and her staff to establish ethos. Through B&R's reentry program, the ex-offenders were strategically positioned to break the rhetorical stigmas and dilemmas of job security as they move to engage in the dominant discourses.

As I mentioned earlier, B&R offers the ex-offenders the opportunity to access literacy, and through their interactions with the program and the staff, they foment conversations and identities that allow them to observe and respond accurately to cues transmitted through social knowledge. This idea of transmitting cues parallels Kenneth Burke's dramatism theorem. In "Questions and Answers about the Pentad," Burke defines *dramatism* or *dramatization* as, "men's actions are to be interpreted in terms of the circumstances in which they

are acting” (333). Before elaborating on the quote, I should point out that his inference to “men” is not restrictive to gender, but rather to humanity. With that said, I believe Burke’s concept of dramatism, as with the ideology concept, rests on the familiarity one has with the community’s communicative device. For Burke, the theorem of dramatism provides the avenue for members to master the operating cues of a contingent. I will add that the mastery of this skill allows the members to act or react to established cues, accordingly.

Walter Fisher’s argument for the narrative paradigm supports Burke’s dramatism as an operating system that advances inquiry and action in communities. Fisher explains in “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument,” that:

Human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, as stories competing with other stories constituted by good reasons, as being rational when they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducements. (Fisher 266)

Fisher’s claim for the narrative paradigm is compelling, and as stated earlier, it complements Burke’s theory of dramatism. That is, through established cues or signals, contingents form systems of ideas that would become the governing factor of its members. Thus, the system eventually becomes a monitor, which becomes a gatekeeper of the system to foresee the movement and the acquisition of social commodities, such as money, power, or status with the intent to distribute such among the individuals the system values as worthy characters.

In connection to the claim for ethos, both Burke and Fisher's argument for social interactions emphasize the need for the construction of the ethical appeal by observing and experimenting with dramatism or the narrative paradigm. Thus writing as a process became the method I used for ex-offenders to observe these politics of literacy and how they relate to ethos construction. The ex-offenders who participated in my project through writing were able to employ dramatism as well as the narrative paradigm principle through peer reviews and constructive feedback to advance their personal narratives.

To conclude this section, my purpose here is to discuss the ideology of literacy and to illustrate its establishment as an avenue for ethos construction. That is, an invitation to experimenting with writing could enable ex-offenders to observe and participate in public discourses. Their participation became the agent through which they could acquire contingent membership and participate in the public conversations. Also, I believe that the ex-offenders could employ literacy, along with cultural and other facets of literacies, to succeed and acquire Aristotle's understanding of happiness or Stuckey's status of literacy as the American synonym for success. Additionally, I believe an engagement in this ideology would promote the ex-offenders' transformation journey, as they would be equipped with the necessary tools to construct and apply the ethical appeal.

Chapter II

Evolution of Ethos

- Ancient Theories of Ethos
- Contemporary Theories of Ethos

The Evolution of Ethos

In this section, I will discuss the evolution of ethos through a survey of ancient to contemporary rhetorics. The theories and rhetoricians I will heavily discuss posit the development of ethos as central to foment and catalyze rhetorical dialogues. Through their individual scholarships, I will illustrate how the ex-offenders of B&R experimented with the writing process to establish ethos while writing their individual personal narratives. Furthermore, the basis of this discussion will become the building block for the analysis of the ex-offenders writing samples in subsequent sections.

Additionally, to provide a larger context for this theoretical inquiry, I will argue the usefulness for ethos construction relishes the effective deployment of communicative influences and directives that aid a rhetor in locating him-/herself in public discourses. This location, whether geographically or rhetorically, becomes the force that moves the rhetor, particularly those on the margins, towards the center of dominant discourses. The core of my argument endorses ethos construction as an applicable tool for the advancement of knowledge, the protocol for the emergence of common knowledge.

This concept of ethos and its evolution is clearly discussed in Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee's book, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary*

Students. In defining *ethos*, the authors attribute the word and the phrase “character” and “ethical proof,” respectively, to encapsulate the ancient use of the word *ethos*. Drawing from this definition, they argue the vitality for *ethos* centers on the ancients’ utility of the word and phrase to capitalize *ethos* as the “proofs that rely on community assessments of a rhetor’s character or reputation” (195). As a result, they suggest that the demonstration of *ethos* depends on intrinsic and extrinsic inferences, which could be charted through community norms or ideologies. Additionally, the authors point out that *ethos* could be constructed through two ways: first is the situated *ethos*, which could be inherited (through one’s place in the family or community); and second is the invented *ethos*, which is constructed through the development of *hexis*, the Greek word for habit (198). Regardless of whether *ethos* is situated or invented, the authors’ suggestion favors that the development of *ethos* is vital both on individual and collective levels.

In reference to Aristotelian rhetoric, Crowley and Hawhee explain that *Hexis* or habit in ancient rhetoric was posited as the line that demarcates the insiders from the outsiders. In our contemporary frame, *Hexis* could be seen as the line that separates victims from the victors, same from other, or us from them. With this in mind, I believe the nature of *Hexis* takes on a divisive frame that compartmentalizes contingent truths and subjects the members to conforming to the dominant truths or become marginalized for opposing them. For instance, habits are cultivated from the norms of a contingent; therefore, refusal to conform to such norms could warrant a marginalized group or an individual to rebel or

resist the beliefs or ideologies of the dominant. Also, this could limit the members of the marginalized group to chart inquiry and employ the necessary language to articulate and address rhetorical dilemmas.

Crowley and Hawhee's argument suggests that the facets of ethos construction (invented and situated) could enable marginalized groups like the ex-offenders to trace ethos and construct the credible character; one that is capable to participate in public discourses. For example, by enrolling in B&R's program, the ex-offenders are taking the necessary steps to deconstruct habits such as drug abuse, alcoholism, crime, and violence. In other words, the ex-offenders are deconstructing criminal habits and replace those habits with good job ethics, which denotes good sense, good moral character, goodwill, and service to community. An example of this could be the ex-offender attending classes, participating in group discussion, offering accounts for day's activities, and remaining committed to the policies of B&R, which are sealed by Christian beliefs.

Judging from Crowley and Hawhee's argument, perhaps the use of invention as a rhetorical strategy to construct ethos is the most dominant approach a marginalized group like the ex-offenders could employ to move towards participating in public discourses. For example, B&R's vision, as explained in the previous section, relies on intrinsic values to motivate the ex-offenders to press through rhetorical dilemmas in reclaiming their lives and the community's. Thus, through the application of the ethical appeal, the ex-

offenders are able to invent the credible persona and appropriate community ideologies to foment rhetorical dialogues and participate in public discourses.

In the discussion of the second facet of ethos, which is situated ethos, Crowley and Hawhee describe it as the branch of ethos that relies on the application of extrinsic or external values to develop the credible character. Once again, they point out that the principle of situated ethos is predominant to people who have strong ties to community agents. With this argument, it could be argued that the ex-offenders lean on Rollins' ethos, who is a successful member of the community; her reputation then becomes the gateway the ex-offenders enter to developing their individual characters. Hence, the attributes of ethos, as explained by Crowley and Hawhee, suggest ethos construction as a crucial and critical process to activate. Nevertheless, once the process is activated, members of a marginalized group could draw on inner abilities and external support systems to obtain the citizenry position. Therefore, for a marginalized group like the ex-offenders, the construction of ethos is extremely critical because it is a requirement to face and overcome possible obstacles in their re-entry process. In order to acquire this credible character, I believe the ex-offender must first deconstruct the criminal character, which by the definition of the community, denotes distrust and lawlessness.

Furthering this discussion, a close examination of the Aristotelian triad of proofs (logos, pathos, and ethos) emphasizes ethos as the heaviest of the three proofs of appeal. This is because ethos as opposed to the other two (logos and pathos) places more authority on the audience to judge the rhetor's level of

persuasion. The lens through which the audience examines the rhetor's ethos is accomplished through Aristotle's three proofs of persuasion; these are good sense, goodwill, and good moral character towards the audience or the general society. By expounding on Aristotle's three proofs of persuasion, society weighs the intention of a rhetor based on his/her motives and how the member communicates these motives to appeal to the general audience. For example, to classify an ex-offender as a person with good moral character, society would have to carefully consider the intention of the ex-offender through the lens of the community ideologies through dramatism or the narrative paradigm.

As a final observation on Crowley and Hawhee's argument, they argue that ethos often in our contemporary discussion of ethos, we, meaning the American society, often "overlook the role played by ethical proofs since most people don't generally reference the character of everyday people" (199). However, when it comes to the presentation of political figures or celebrities, they go on to suggest that Americans occasionally and thoroughly query the characters of the people in the public spaces. Though society often, but not always, presumed that public figures are expected to exhibit concrete ethical proofs, I also believe that ex-offenders are also required to demonstrate the attributes of credible character before their citizenry benefits are reconciled. It is true that they are not running for a political position; however, they, just like the politicians, seek the trust of the people. And to obtain that trust, I believe that the ex-offenders have to position themselves accurately. An enrollment in B&R's

program confirms that the ex-offenders are open to answer the questions of the people.

Ancient Theories of Ethos

Since the time of Aristotle through to contemporary rhetoricians, the evolution of ethos is often referred to as the ancient semiotic source. Again, this premise hinges on the Aristotelian rhetoric, which emphasizes the ethical proofs as the predominant mode for constructing ethos. Furthermore, the democratic or subversive implication of rhetoric suggests that the rhetor could activate ethos to evaluate and discern the community ideology in an attempt to construct a well-versed argument. This implication also confirms that the construction of rhetorical arguments as an avenue for marginalized groups like the ex-offenders to observe the ideologies at play in the center with the intention for participation.

William M. Sattler's article "Conceptions of Ethos in Ancient Rhetoric" explains the traditional attributes of ethos by examining the Greek root words. Similar to Crowley and Hawhee, Sattler attempts to define ethos by tracing the following Greek words: custom, habit, and usage. He uses these words to construct a definition for ethos, which according to him, aligns with the ancients' definition of ethos. He argues the traditional use of ethos as the engagement of "habits, and traditions of one social group as distinguished from another" (55). In this explanation, ethos then denotes the collegial operation of acceptable norms and practices for a micro-contingent or society at large.

Sattler's concept parallels the traditional implications of ethos ranging from pre-Socratic Sophists to Plato (ca. 428-347 B.C.E.). He notes Aristotle, as Plato's student, recorded the *Rhetoric*, the origination of ethos. Unlike ethos, Sattler mentions logos and pathos as emotional or pathological appeals because they are based on factual contents of the rhetor's message. Consequently, the combination of the three appeals is relevant to the speaker because it provides him/her the authority and credibility to present an argument that would leave the audience embracing the speaker's viewpoint.

Similarly, in Connors and Corbett's earlier argument, the ethical appeal is particularly "important in rhetorical discourse, because here we deal with matters about which absolute certainty is impossible and opinions are divided" (72). Supporting their claim, the authors recounted Quintilian's rhetoric by pointing to it as the, "Deliberative [political] oratory," which has the "most need for the ethical appeal" (72). Simply put, their claim confirms the presentation of the ethical appeal as the forte of ancient rhetorics.

Operating in a similar vein, Roger D. Cherry expands on this concept in "*Ethos Versus Persona*" where he makes a case for the construction of ethos by tracing the footprints of the Aristotelian rhetoric. Cherry argues that in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes ethos as the essential tool in the deliberation of public matters (3). That is, even though logos and pathos support the rhetor's argument, without the appropriation of ethos, there is likelihood that the rhetor's argument would be questioned. So to prevent employing the art of persuasion ineffectively, the rhetor

should appropriate the principles of ethos, either through the inventive or situated technique.

As an interjection, let me ask this question to connect ethos back to my work with ex-offenders. The question pushes forth the process of how the ex-offenders could develop and employ ethos to deconstruct their past and reconstruct future identities. The question is this: if *ethos* is a proof system centered on the construction of public reputation, how then could the ex-offenders commence the process for constructing ethos when the ex-offenders physical and rhetorical position pins them as lawbreakers or criminals? Some experts may argue that it is the responsibility of the ex-offender to face the consequences of his/her actions. While this is correct, it begs another question, when is an ex-offender completely free? The answer to this question charts another line of inquiry, which support the employment of ethos as the predominate tool the ex-offender could use to peel off the label of a criminal identity and begin to construct the responsible character.

Clearly, Aristotle had these questions in mind since his three proofs of appeal suggest that ethos could be reinvented through the application and inspiration of good sense, good moral character, and goodwill (1378). Ideally, these ethical appeals are generated by how the character demonstrates these three proofs within the content and delivery of the speech. I would like to make the observation that, based on Aristotle's pragmatics, these attributes could be appropriated as means for developing authentic or fabricated arguments. I say this to point out that if marginalized groups do not properly understand the

dominant culture and the reasoning behind its ideologies, it is possible that marginalized groups, like dictators, would only use rhetoric as a brainwashing or propaganda device.

Perhaps the fabrication of ethos could be avoided through the application of Cicerone rhetoric. James M. May in *Trials of Character: The Eloquence of Ciceronian Ethos* explains that *ethos* does not derive from a singular Greek word, but rather from different Latin words. In his argument, he draws on the Cicerone discussion for the “ideal Orator” by describing its attributes as follows: he/she must have *conciliare*, meaning to attract favor of, render favorably disposed, commend, or bring together, as well as *delectare*, which is to be delightful and charming towards the audience or the contingent (5). Both of these words put emphasis on the rhetor’s ability to demonstrate goodwill towards the audience. This would enable the rhetor to employ ethos as a means of persuasion, which then could enable the rhetor to comply with the set of ideologies operating in the contingent.

Additionally, May emphasizes that the sociopolitical atmosphere of ancient Rome placed a high demand on the construction of ethos since its operation heavily rested on the judiciary branch and public matters. May argues that it was through this process that Cicero was able to work his way to consulship (which is equivalent to the status of a president or a prime minister in contemporary society) by observing and employing the language of the “Forum, i.e. the lawcourts.” May goes on to say that it was Cicero’s participation in the Forum that empowered him to access “the exigencies of the Roman and judicial system,”

thereby granting him the privilege to uphold a position that offered him the space to invent ethos (14). Without the Forum, it is likely that Cicero may have lacked the agency to advance politically or rhetorically in ancient Rome.

In my observation of the Cicerone rhetoric, I posit it as different from Aristotle's in that Cicero's offers a less rigid process for the development and establishment of ethos, or the burden of proof. Thus, the use the space becomes a leading factor in this composition of ethos. Through this space, marginalized groups could gain the necessary tools to operate in the dominant. An example of this is seen in a mock interview class offered at B&R. The purpose for the class is to equip the ex-offenders with interview skills and also to ensure that the ex-offenders are versed in job interview protocols. One of the requirements of the class is that participating ex-offenders would attend the session properly dressed; that is, a collared shirt and tie with dress pants for the men and a business attire or suit for the women.

Though the ex-offenders valued the question and answer session of the mock interview classes, some, particularly the men, disagreed with the demand to dress up for the class. In one of the writing project workshops, one of the ex-offenders, when discussing the concept of individual agency as it relates to the first impression, stated that dressing up for interviews (whether mock or real) is a "fake" process. He supported his claim by saying, "people don't go around dressing like that every day." His claim is interesting, but what he may have failed to understand is the ideology of employment (at least within the context of the American society) demands the correct attire for an interview: it signifies

individual investment for the potential job. For this reason, the interviewer may regard the interviewee's action in that the consideration for image is in line with the company's reputation. Although the daily dress code for the potential job may be ragged jeans and stained shirts, the company would often demand potential employee's presentation to appropriately align with corporate America's demand.

B&R's attempt with the mock interview to point out what May and Wisse describe as the Cicerone ideal orator. According to May and Wisse, the ideal orator should be willing to display "natural gifts of intellect as well as physical qualities such as a good voice and appropriate bodily movement" (11). Obviously, B&R's regimen with the mock interview is to position the ex-offenders to display their natural gifts. So to ensure that the gifts are cultivated and displayed appropriately, they designed a class that would empower the ex-offenders to enhance physical qualities, as well as appropriate voice and attitude needed to secure a job from an interview.

Thus, Cicero's principle for the ideal orator suggests that marginalized groups with limited or no cultural context to engage with a specific discourse could gain membership in that discourse through observation and application. In line with the ex-offenders rhetoric, by participating in the mock interview, an ex-offender may cultivate the tools needed to gradually overcome the impediments of dress code, thereby increasing the opportunity to secure a job. Overall, May concludes that Cicero utilizes the Forum as the center for establishing ethos. As such, the role of the ideal orator opens the space for ideologies to be dissected and appropriated and an avenue to generate knowledge. It is through this that

marginalized people could deploy the knowledge acquired to construct the ethical character.

Linking this back to Stuckey's argument for the ideology of literacy, it appears that the engagement of ideology and literacy, when traced historically, initiates and advances critical thinking. This enablement then positions literacy as the identification tool, which may later direct members to act and talk effectively within the contingent. As a result, I believe May and Wisse's description of Cicero's adornment for the speaker, the audience, the subject, and the society, as a means to construct the ethical appeal is compelling. Thus, as a way to restore trust to contingent members, the ex-offenders would have to trace the fundamentals of ancient rhetorics and appropriate their findings in ethos construction. With this in mind, May stresses the character or the ideal orator has the responsibility to utilize ethos based on contingent truths to craft persuasive arguments and to engage in public matters.

Contemporary Theories of Ethos

Burke's voluminous work, particularly *A Rhetoric of Motives*, brings new perspectives to the modern conception of *ethos*. Harmonizing the Cicerone rhetoric for the ideal orator and the establishment of ethos, Burke's identification concept illustrates that the process of ethos construction and how it could be used in a forum. For instance, Burke discusses the concept and the application of *identification* as concurrent to the traditional doctrine of the ethical appeal. He attests that the principle of identification and persuasion is a central system,

which supplies “ways in which the members of a group promote social cohesion by identifying with something larger and more comprehensive” (xiv). Through the principle of identification, Burke suggests areas that are often ignored in public discourses may gain attention for rediscovery or reinvention. Furthering this claim, Burke explains the implication of autonomous identification considers,

The fact that an activity is capable of reduction to intrinsic, autonomous principles does not argue that it is free from identification with other orders of motivation extrinsic to it... [For] the human agent, qua human agent, is not motivated solely by the principles of a specialized activity, however strongly this specialized power, in its suggestive role as imagery, may affect his character.

(27)

Obviously, I imagine the motive for identification takes pressure off intrinsic and extrinsic activities. This claim comes from Burke’s analogy of the shepherd and the sheep. In his illustration, Burke describes the shepherd’s intrinsic activity as a caretaker for the sheep; he, the shepherd, oversees the well-being of the sheep and ensures their safety. On the other hand, the shepherd’s responsibility from an extrinsic standpoint could be identified (by the society) as a project that he is raising the sheep for commercial purposes (27). Thus, identification positions the ex-offenders as the sheep that lean on Rollins, who could be seen as the shepherd, equipping and protecting the sheep as they move towards the center. This process would also enable the ex-offender to

carefully identify and interpret the ideologies of the community in the reentry journey.

Followers of Burke concur to support identification by stating that it subconsciously exposes models that would enable one on the margins to participate in the dominant. In *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp discuss identification by stating that it is generally accomplished “through various properties or substances, which indicates physical objects, occupations, friends, beliefs, and values” (174). Their assertion parallels Stuckey’s definition for an ideology, which draws on contingent ideas. On that note, the action of community members, according to Fisher’s narrative paradigm, offers the use of language as the premise for constructing ethos. As I stated earlier, Burke himself noted that his usage of identification is synonymous to the traditional use of persuasion. I believe this comparison is a component of Cicerone rhetoric. That is, ideologies and social knowledge constructed within the forum points to identification or characterization as the building block for constructing ethos.

Additionally, Burke explains that the means of persuasion is done through the use of language, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, and so on. Here, his suggestion is similar to May and Wisse’s discussion of Cicerone rhetoric. This means that the ideal orator has to possess and display natural gifts required for public engagement. Thus, persuasion takes place when the speaker carefully employs the language of a specific contingent. Drawing from their arguments, the position of the speaker is crucial because it also enables a

marginalized group like the ex-offenders to build agency and to develop ethos construction. For example, the excerpt below is a personal narrative from one of the ex-offenders who participated in my writing project. The author was one of ex-offenders who initially shunned writing as a process for inventing ethos. For this ex-offender, the connection of writing as a tool to construct ethos was unclear since he already identified himself as a non-writer.

The title of the piece is “The Picture on the Wall.” For the purpose of this project and to protect the identities of the ex-offenders, I will use pseudonyms for all the participants whose work I will discuss. For this piece, I will call the author Larry. His piece reads,

Picture on the Wall

When I was about eleven years old, I was influenced by one of my older cousins to do art work. I watched him draw pictures of comic-book characters and he was really good at it. He made the pictures look exactly like the ones in the book. I noticed how he uses few his lines very slowly so that he wouldn't make too many mistakes, such as drawing a head too big for the rest of the body or drawing a hand that didn't match with the rest of the arm.

I found interest in it and tried it myself. I started staring at pictures and tried drawing them on whatever paper I could find. I always used pencils because I know from watching my cousin that I would make mistakes that I would have to erase. Drawing was kind of hard and I wanted so much to be good at it. Then I came up with

an idea that would make my pictures look a lot better. I start tracing the pictures and just colored them when I finished.

All the time, I traced the pictures, I liked the way they looked display and even hung them on the wall in my bedroom, but I never felt completely satisfied because I copied something instead of drawing from the skills of my own hands. So after a while, I figured that with all the practice of drawing lines that I got from tracing, I might be able to draw a little better.

The first picture I drew without tracing surprised me. It looked almost identical to the picture in the book. I was proud of it and hung it on my wall and soon after that, I started taking down all the pictures I had traced. This was because I felt that I no longer needed to trace and because I was becoming a skilled artist.

As I got older, I found new ways to improve my drawing, such as measuring and comparing the sizes of different objects in a picture. This was used so I wouldn't draw anything out of proportion. I also learned to always push down very lightly with the pencil in case I make a mistake, it would be easy to erase. When I got used to drawing, I learned how things were suppose to look like and I would draw something from a comic book and make it look better in detail than the original artist.

Larry's piece is compelling, not only because of the authentic voice but also because as the piece unfolds, Larry's text demonstrates and confirms the

ancients' argument for constructing ethos. He employs Aristotle's principle of mimesis, which is the art of perfection through imitation. He established his desire as an aspiring artist by tracing his cousin's work. Larry documents his attempt to become an artist as he carefully watched his cousin, who holds the dominant place in this discussion. Through identification and participation in this forum, Larry began to experiment with the process to construct his natural gifts as the ideal orator. In fact, later in his narrative, he examined his work metacognitively to determine which work deserves the public eye.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate that the establishment of ethos could be constructive through literacy. Obviously Larry's work affirms such a claim. His piece clearly pinpoints the importance of identification or imitation as a process to construct a new character. Larry was unaware of his ability to compose an identical image through praxis; however, by observing his cousin, he gained access to activate and develop the persona of an artist. Though Larry did not state whether this process allowed him to attend art school, it clearly illustrates that Larry is willing to perfect the knowledge acquired and composed.

Chapter III

Methodology: Writing Workshop with the Ex-offenders

B&R is an ex-offender reentry program located in the Highland Park community of Richmond, Virginia. The location of the organization is valid because not only is the community known to law enforcers as the hub of crime, drugs, and violence, but it is also the home to hundreds of ex-offenders who are released from the Richmond City Jail every week. As a reminder, the mission of the organization according to Rollins, the founder and CEO, is to construct a program that acknowledges the dilemmas ex-offenders may encounter when released from prison. For Rollins and her staff, the key to transforming a community like Highland Park and reduce the vicious cycle of recidivism is through the following:

Combining comprehensive reentry training with thriving consumer-centered entrepreneurial ventures and cross-cultural initiatives, [to] previously incarcerated individuals to productive lives, creates jobs, and generates an ever-widening "force field" of hope for a severely blighted community and a metropolitan area historically divided by race and class. (<http://www.boazandruth.com>)

Clearly, the quote, which is an excerpt from the organization's mission strategies, demonstrates that the organization's interest is to revitalize individual lives and the general community of Highland Park. The riveting aspect of the organization's mission is the process through which B&R aspires to revive the lives of the individual ex-offenders by building what Rollins refers to as a

“cathedral” in Highland Park, in part by restoring Highland Park to the “once thriving business” community it was before the white flight of 1960s

(<http://www.boazandruth.com>).

Based on the riveting mission of the organization, it is worth noting that the organization is very successful. I believe the success of the program is centered on the organization’s attempt to provide necessary skills for the ex-offenders to engage in public discourses. For Rollins, this process includes constructing “respectful relationships,” and attending “an average of 50 hours a week in classes, counseling sessions, [and] on-the-job training and community service projects” (<http://www.boazandruth.com>). Though this process seems extensive, the ex-offenders I worked with valued it because it provides them the space to observe and participate in conversations at the center. For some, the program offers a therapeutic framework that allows the ex-offenders to share reentry journey stories. Classes like the one I designed complements B&R’s mission because it enabled the ex-offenders to address public issues.

Thus, the success of the organization at the time I partnered with them was highly rated in the life lab programs. These programs allow the ex-offenders to develop vocational and interpersonal skills that would allow them to function in the job force and in local communities. The underdeveloped class at that time, according to the curriculum director, was the writing skills class. Apparently, the organization’s effort to encourage the ex-offenders to write their individual testimonies was not successful. In spite of the organization’s countless attempts, the ex-offenders when presented with the opportunity to record or write their

personal narratives settled for the recording. This left the organization with the need to seek transcribers who would help translate the recorded testimonies to text. This was where I came in.

Though I was willing to help with transcribing the recordings, I chose not to because at the time I believed I could motivate the ex-offenders to write and I had the scholarship of rhetoric and composition as a guiding principle. Also, I thought of the moment as *kairotic*, meaning it was the opportune time for me to deploy the theories I studied. So I convinced the organization to allow my writing project instead of the transcription, and they agreed. The room assigned to my class, "Writing Your Story," was a conference room with seats around a table for about twenty people. The room was located in the organization's thrift store. Unlike corporate conference rooms which are well-lit, with reclining chairs and enough space to twirl around, this room had enough space to seat 18-20 people and was not bright as the dark bricks covered the walls. The interesting part to this conference room was that some of the thrift store items were stored or hung in the room.

My weekly schedule for classes was eight o'clock in the morning, twice (Mondays and Wednesdays) a week for a total of two hours a week. By the first workshop meeting, sixteen ex-offenders had enrolled for the class. Nine of them were women and seven men. In terms of racial demographics, only one Caucasian male signed up for the first session. The syllabus I designed for the class, which is included in the appendix of this thesis, outlined the structure of the class and the expectation for the participant. On a typical meeting day, I started

my sessions with attendance, read and discussed the writing prompt and wrote for twenty minutes or more, depending on the discussion. After the writing sessions, I asked for volunteers to read or share their writings with the class. At the end of every meeting, I recapped the principle behind the writing prompt, which was to construct ethos and connect the principle to skills that the ex-offenders exhibited in their discussion and writing of the prompt.

To ensure that this structure was followed, at the beginning of the first class meeting, I handed out a copy of the syllabus followed by a careful explanation of the class rationale as mentioned in the syllabus. The rationale reads:

The objective of the course, "Writing Your Story," is to enable the participants to write their personal narrative by weaving life experiences that occurred before, during and after incarceration. The class will be conducted in a workshop format to ensure that the participants have time to write a portion of their stories during class, and also to provide the space to ask and share experiences about the writing process to an active audience for critical and constructive feedback to assist future revisions. By the end of the six weeks sessions, successful participants who attended all six sessions would have written a minimum of a three-page memoir, which they will read out loud to the entire class during the last meeting.

After a slow reading and explanation of the rationale, I noticed that all sixteen participants were still in the room, actively listening to my voice. At the end of my explanations, I asked for questions, as I expected them to ask questions based on the emphasis I placed on writing, but to my surprise, there were none. Without wasting any time, I assigned the first writing prompt, which simply asked the ex-offenders to explain in two sentences whether they like or dislike writing. As the facilitator/teacher, the prompt was a diagnostic question designed to discern the group's reaction to writing. A majority of their responses depicted writing as difficult, hard, and tedious.

One ex-offender in particular wrote, "I hate writing. I don't like to write because I am not good with English stuff." I asked the ex-offender what he meant by "English stuff" and he responded, "I'm not good with spelling and all that grammar stuff." Almost all the heads in the room nodded as the ex-offenders explained what he meant. The ex-offenders saw the burden of grammatical and mechanical errors as a rhetorical barrier that has prevented them from discovering and experimenting with writing as a process for constructing ethos.

Later, I realized that the group's response to the prompt characterized them as reluctant writers not because they cannot write, but because they cannot write the codes of the dominant culture. That is, they did not respond willing to writing as someone accustomed to the process would. In a sense, I believe the ex-offenders resist writing because the dominant approach to writing incarcerates their ability to freely express themselves in their own language, whether through vernacular or cultural literacies. In linking literacy to freedom, Katherine Bassard

in “Gender and Genre: Black Women’s Autobiography and the Ideology of Literacy,” she made an outstanding observation by stating, “a term like literacy involves much more than the simple learning of ABCs” (119). This was very accurate for the ex-offenders because they could articulate their ABCs correctly but the difficulty came when I asked them to write, to compose a text version of their personal narrative. This process goes beyond reciting ABCs to employing the characters of the English alphabet in framing the ex-offenders’ thoughts into text. This process is what I believe the ex-offenders referred to as tedious and difficult because now they have to follow writing conventions, which include mechanical and grammatical correctness. With this as a stumbling block, the freedom to express and experience the self in writing became almost impossible for the ex-offenders.

Realizing that the purpose of my writing project was to encourage the ex-offenders to write their stories and not to tell it, I decided to use the objects in the conference room as part of my writing prompt. That is, I designed a prompt that allowed the ex-offenders to use an object in the room as a metaphor to help them write their personal narratives. In designing that prompt, I decided to also follow Peter Elbow’s approach for freewriting exercises. In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow defines *freewriting exercises* as a brainstorming technique that requires the writer to write for a minimum of ten minutes without stopping to “look back, to cross something out, to wonder what word or thought to use, or to think about what you are doing” (1). I first stumbled upon this concept in graduate school. To this day, I still remember my initial response, which was, “Why hadn’t my

undergraduate professors taught me this principle?” Not to say this principle would have miraculously transformed the challenges I endured as a second language English speaker and writer, but I do believe it would have enlightened my journey in the process.

Interestingly, when I discussed the freewriting exercises to the ex-offenders, their reaction resembled mine. I explained to them that the emphasis of the writing that they would complete in the class would focus on composing text, not mechanical and grammatical errors. This notice was refreshing to the ex-offenders and it allowed them to rethink as they gladly responded in writing to the later writing prompts. The second writing prompt asked the ex-offenders to:

Carefully observe an object in the room, use the object as metaphor to describe the world the use to live in, the world they live in now, and the world they hope to live in the future.

Some writing samples that came from this prompt were very compelling and I would like to include all sixteen entries here, but due to space, I will only include three samples. The samples are male ex-offenders, James, Luckie, and Hamed. Unlike Hamed and the other ex-offenders who were able identify objects in the room to write their personal narratives, James and Luckie were unable to relate to the items in the conference room. So I modified the prompt for them and asked them to think of anything in or outside the room that would fully represent their narratives. This made it easy for them as they explored symbols outside of the room.

James' identified his narrative to the hero of a movie and this is what he wrote:

My life is like a movie. When I was a child, I use to watch gangster movies and I wanted to be hero of the movie. But when I was a teenager, I realized the script is not yet finish, because I hope to leave a legacy behind to [the upcoming] generation. To me if I didn't get locked up, I would have been lost. When I was locked up, I spent most of my time with in my room (cell) or in the hole because my mind can't take too much thinking without exploding.

Similar to James, Luckie identified object is a painting of Dr. Martin Luther King, which was mounted in the wall adjacent to the entrance of conference room, but it was not in our meeting room. This is what he wrote:

If I were an object, I would be a wall painting picture of Martin Luther King Jr. Why? Because of what he stood for, he represents pride, courage and power. It would also allow me the opportunity to watch all who enters and exist the room- the good, the bad and the ugly. Martin Luther King Jr. was a great man, who provided for his family and loved ones. He stood firm for what he believed in, all in all, it is a reflection of me.

Hamed's object was the brick arch of the wall in the conference room. At six-foot plus and muscular, it was no surprise that Hamed would identify an object that signified strength. This is how he described his object:

If I was an object in this building, I would be the brick arch on the wall. I love that because it represents strength. It represents stability. This object is unmoved...it is in support only with other bricks, a team to form one strong and stable piece... A unity formed by not just one individual piece. Here at Boaz and Ruth, we are all connected; we represent that memory of being one, through service to our community, our fellow man.

All three of these excerpts are diverse, yet connected. I say diverse because James' relation to a legendary hero is different from Luckie's connection to Dr. King. This is because movie heroes are mostly fictional characters. Not to say that these characters are not inspirational, but was almost as if James aspiration for leaving a legacy was imaginative. On the other hand, Luckie saw himself as a reflection of Dr. King because Dr. King believed in freedom. The desire to experience total freedom is something that a majority of the ex-offenders aspired to. Unfortunately, according to the ex-offenders, being released from prison does not constitute complete freedom because the stigma of the crime lasts for eternity. To comment on Hamed's excerpt (a copy of his full narrative is recorded in the appendix) at the time of this project, he was a fifty plus years old, repeat felon, whose encounters with law enforcement started when he was twelve years old. By referring to himself as a brick arch, I believe this was Hamed's attempt to recognize the challenges he had experienced and referred to those challenges as building blocks that led him to his current situation. Perhaps it was this reorganization that allowed Hamed to find stability

in B&R's program, where participation in the program empowered him for community service.

Wayne Campbell Peck, Linda Flower, and Lorraine Higgins define *community engagement* as "a search for an alternative discourse" (205). I believe my work with the ex-offenders allowed us (the ex-offenders and myself) to discover an alternative discourse in identifying the issues at play in the ex-offenders' rhetoric. For instance, James, Luckie, and Hamed are three ex-offenders who, by writing their narrative and using metaphors, were enabled to write their narratives with a diverse perspective. Whether James' was based on fictional character or not, it is important to note that he understood the importance of leaving behind a worthy legacy. Thus the alternative discourse here is B&R's second chance program. The organization allows the ex-offenders to work along with Rollins and her staff to rebuild individual and community lives.

To conclude this section, the teaching of writing informs ethos construction. Elbow's freewriting exercises carried the weight of my writing project. It influenced the ex-offenders to rethink writing and participate in the provided space to observe and construct ethos as writers and community members working alongside Rollins and her staff to better the community. Also, by describing writing as an expressive and continual process, the ex-offenders were able to reappropriate writing and willingly submitted to experimenting with the process. The reappropriation of literacy then allowed the ex-offenders to study its fundamental power. And over time, they constructed texts that I believe contended with issues discussed at the center of the dominant. Overall, the ex-

offenders' exposure reoriented their minds that literacy is an essential agent for ethos construction. In its lowest use, I believe the ex-offenders who participated in my project realized that their narratives assisted them to articulate their individual and collective criminal histories after they have checked "yes" to the felon question on a job or an apartment application.

Chapter IV

Analytical Survey of Literacy and the Emergence of Community

Literacy

The Politics of Literacy

In earlier sections of this thesis, I discussed Stuckey's claim for the politics and the ideology of literacy as a line that has the agency to demarcate and stratify members within a contingent into sub-groups. Her argument favors Marxist theory in that posits literacy as a tool capitalist society could employ to advance privileged sub-group. Her claim is riveting because it supports my claim that literacy is an essential tool for constructing ethos. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the ideology of literacy and to demonstrate how I applied it in my work with the ex-offenders.

At the initial stage of my project, my goal was to facilitate the writing project as an avenue through which the ex-offenders could gain the required agency to establish ethos to write their personal narratives. Though this goal remained as a backdrop of the project, there were a few modifications that later arose due to the initial resistance I perceived from the ex-offenders. At first, I presumed the interpretation of literacy is given to all Americans due to the statement that education is the key to success. This discovery called for the modification of my role in the project, which moved from a facilitator to a teacher to a fellow learner. Through these views, I was privileged to better understand the ex-offenders' claim for the writing process, and it also enabled me to examine

the roots of the presumption I had in regard to the ex-offenders' interpretation of literacy.

Later in this section I will discuss at length the disconnection I encountered as I attempted to peel off and contrast the ex-offenders' interpretation of literacy against the dominant. As a side note, I believe historical records, such as history of slavery and colonialism, have fueled the ex-offenders resistance to the writing as a process for construction ethos. Perhaps they imagined that acquisition of literacy (formal education) is conforming to the dominant culture and abandoning cultural literacies. If this claim is valid, it supports Stuckey's Marxist argument for literacy, which posits it as a divisive tool operating within contingents to categorize and marginalize members into sub-groups. Adding to this discussion, I will also elaborate on the process through which I developed credibility to establish a trustworthy relationship with the ex-offenders. This relationship allowed the ex-offenders to see me as a member of their community instead of the other.

Paulo Friere's book, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*, makes a critical case for education. He explains *education* as a means of communication that requires an understanding and engagement of what he considers critical consciousness or *conscientization*. He defines conscientization as the "joint project in that place in a man among other men, men united by their action and by their reflection upon that action and upon the word" (85). In essence, Friere posits that raising social and political

consciousness is required to chart inquiry and action that would dissect the ideologies of the dominant.

Drawing from Friere and Stuckey's theoretical views, it appears that literacy, when applied accurately, could stir up conversations among marginalized groups. This conversation could lead the marginalized groups to develop and the advance critical consciousness. This could then transform them. In discussing the politics of literacy, Stuckey proposes literacy as a discourse that establishes concepts, viewpoints, and values at the expense of others. Hence, this establishment could lead to contradiction of shared belief systems within contingents and if the contradiction is not properly discussed, it could lead to the marginalization of the minority. Stuckey positions the prospect of literacy, as a micro ideology in the macro ideology of the American Dream. Perhaps, she would claim that believers of the American Dream often envision literacy (the dominant approach to reading, writing, and the advancement of knowledge) as the key to success. To Stuckey, this presentation of literacy takes on a violent tone that would generate resistance and possible conflicts from marginalized groups. In her argument she encapsulates the politics of literacy by saying:

Literacy education begins in the idea of the socially and economically dominant class and it takes the forms of socially acceptable subjects, stylistically permissible forms, range of difference or deviance, baselines of gratification. Becoming literate signifies in large part the ability to conform or, at least, to appear conformist. (19)

Stuckey's expression denotes awareness and bewilderment of literacy as the engine that drives marginalization not merely upwards or downward, but also laterally. It could be argued that literacy calls on marginalized groups to accept and assimilate contingent individual beliefs to the conflicting values of the dominant.

Stanley Aronowitz in his book, *The Crisis in Historical Materialism*, discusses the question of class and its science from a Marxist standpoint. According to Aronowitz, society expects its masses to embrace its ideology because "cultural forms are necessary for the reproduction of society, for sustaining its division of labor and social hierarchy" (112). Thus, understanding the practice of literacy as a language of profit would empower not only those in the dominant discourses, but it would also benefit those on the margins. In fact, Stuckey in her argument defines the contemporary essence of literacy in American culture as "the language of profit" (19). Thus, for Stuckey, to profit or to advance critical consciousness, the cultivation of social knowledge is pivotal. Supporting her claim, Stuckey consults Aronowitz's definition for literacy, which posit reading and writing" to literacy. According to Aronowitz, the two, reading and writing, are vital elements to the "conditions of survival" (quoted in Stuckey 19).

Obviously the works of Friere and Stuckey, as well as Aronowitz's on the politics of literacy provides a space to chart inquiry that would enable marginalized groups to move towards the center. Additionally, I believe that their works positions literacy as a branch in the American Dream ideology. It is

through this branch that concepts are challenged to establish critical consciousness. Having said this, I believe, literacy has coin-like attributes in that it has two distinct natures. That is, on one side of the coin, literacy could be seen as a tool that empowers and moves people on the margins towards the dominant discourse. On the other side, it has a violent nature, which could be a result of historical conversations related to slavery and colonialism. I propose that the former attribute is often regarded as the tool that could motivate outsiders to move to participate in the dominant. Likewise, the latter carries the interpretation of literacy as violent and controlling. Regardless of the process used to describe literacy, it is obvious to note that its position in society is recognized by both dominant and marginalized contingents.

With that said, when I first met the ex-offenders, I was persuaded that the ex-offenders would welcome the ideology of literacy as the agent to discover and establish ethos. I was wrong. My assumption was developed from the fact that I perceived the ex-offenders as individuals working to reclaim their individual lives; this was evident by their decision to enroll in B&R's program. Additionally, I developed my presumption from my African cultural background, which honors education from the colonial standpoint; that is, it is the key to success. Unfortunately, the men and women I worked with had a different interpretation of literacy, and it took several sessions for me to understand their claims and apply rhetoric and composition theories that would invite them to rethink and reappropriate writing as a process for constructing ethos.

Understanding the Disconnect

Mina Shaughnessy, in "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing," urges basic writing teachers to critically evaluate writers' socioeconomic background. She urges teachers to examine the potential sources of their incompetence, which could be "rooted in the limits" the students were raised with or limitations that were probably imposed upon them by the world around them (235). For instance, someone (like me) could embrace the writing as a process because according to the colonial doctrine, education is the key to success. My interpretation for this prior to entering the academy was that education leads to total freedom. By freedom, I am referring to the freedom of speech and from poverty and oppression. Because of this, a confinement in any of these areas may affect the way a writer interacts with the writing enterprise.

When I designed the writing prompts I talked about earlier, I carefully (and in some cases, moderately) considered the dynamics of the following: age, gender, race, and class. The age range was interesting; it varied from early twenties to late fifties. As far as time spent in incarceration, there was also an alarming gap between months and the number of years spent behind bars from one ex-offender to the other. In relation to gender, both sexes were well represented except for the last two sessions whereby the male population was slightly higher than the female. There was also a distinct representation in race and class; a majority of the ex-offenders were from minority groups. They were predominantly African-Americans, who prior to incarceration were either unemployed or in the working class. There were a handful of entrepreneurs and

Caucasians, but they were the minority. Because a majority of the participants represented minority groups in the American society, class and racial issues became the dominant thread that tied together the dynamics of the topics discussed in class. An element of this is seen in the texts composed.

Linda Flower and John Hayes's article "The Cognitive of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem" enabled me to frame the analysis of the ex-offenders' work. In their argument, they suggest cognitive or critical thinking as the primary factor for locating rhetorical situations, and to chart inquiry and action. They argue, "Writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing" (366). Though this is a straightforward concept, Flower and Hayes argue that it could be easily missed because it contrasts traditional or as they put it, "linear," model for composing text (367). Thus, for Flower and Hayes, the cognitive process of discovery enables writers to properly position the stages of writing without committing to sequential frames of the narrative. This approach to writing could create disarray, as the thoughts would attempt to overpower the process.

To prevent this from happening, Flower and Hayes suggest the best way to describe something, such as the composing process, that refuses to sit still for a portrait is through the model process. They believe that this would allow the writer to use "hypothesis" to carefully describe the components of "the system and how they work together" (368). In such, I believe that the use of "hypothesis" parallels the use of metaphor in that it may allow the writer to narrate an experience using a different perspective. Flower and Hayes continue with the

discussion for the use of the cognitive application in writing by explaining that the process allows writers to experiment with writing conventions. The conventions include, “The task environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the writing processes” (369). If the conventions are applied, it is likely that the writer would construct a text that is not limited to the actual writing itself, but the writer would creatively envision the self as part of the process. Additionally, the writer would employ unconventional techniques to critically position the task environment and the audience while he/she frames the argument.

With this in mind, when I designed the writing prompts I discussed earlier, I decided to use writing with metaphors as the model for inviting ex-offenders to write personal narratives that recount their lives before, during, and after prison. This attempt was successful because it became a gateway for some of the ex-offenders to write. Janet Emig, in “Writing as a Model of Learning,” expounds on the importance for exercising models tools for teaching and learning. In her discussion, she posits the cognitive process as a model for teaching and learning writing. She argues that the striking element of teaching writing as a process is the very nature itself, because writing, according to her, deals with actuality for acquiring language through “symbolic transformation of experience through the specific symbol system of verbal language... shaped into an icon” (10). That is to say through the acquisition of language, the writer gains the agency to interpret symbols and apply empirical knowledge in order to advance critical consciousness.

Perhaps, the appropriation of such knowledge is what enables the writer to exercise the three components of Flower and Hayes' claim for the cognitive application. Either way, it is evident from Emig's argument that the interpretation of the symbols embedded in the writing process is influenced by the writer's socioeconomic background. In fact, Emig proposes that the critical interpretation of symbols enables the writer to activate the "fullest functioning of the brain, which entails the active participation in the process of both the left and the right hemispheres" (11). Maybe it is through this process that the writer discovers a rhetorical problem and with time this problem becomes the gateway for the writer to enter and participate in public discourses.

Moving forward, Emig explains that when the brain is operating in fullest capacity, it establishes what she calls "systematic connections and relationships" that push forth the transformation process when the writing environment is established (12). For it allows the brain to systematically generate thoughts that could ignite the writer's ability to employ writing as a tool. Emig's defines this process as *epigenetical*, meaning the writer examines composed text with the critical eye to disrupt linear traditional conventions to rearrange events based on persuasive appeal. Similar to Flower and Hayes' concept for the rhetorical situation, whereby the writer uses critical thinking to locate rhetorical problems and foment dialogues, Emig's argument for the epigenetic allows the writer to go beyond locating rhetorical problems to applying the hidden persuader as a means to craft arguments that would contend with discussions at the center.

Going back to the first writing prompt, I believed the ex-offenders responded to writing as difficult and tedious process because they were yet to envision writing as a language of profit. To repeat the prompt, I asked them to write in two sentences their opinion of writing. Their initial response to the prompt was unsettling for a first year-graduate student. Again, the overwhelming responses I received were, “I hate writing” or “Writing is not for me” or it is too “difficult.”

Aside from the fact that their phrases almost forced me to credit the idea that my project was unprofitable to the ex-offenders, their collective response got me thinking, “Do these ex-offenders understand the profit of literacy?” By literacy here, I am referring to the dominant approach to reading and writing and using it as a tool to forge a reputable character. I came to believe that a majority of them were unaware of this reference to literacy because even for those who could read and write fluently, the connection of literacy as a profitable tool was absent. I settled for this conclusion after I asked a follow-up question, “Why do you think writing is difficult?” An outspoken ex-offender explained this with an example.

She said, “I don’t like to write because it takes time to write, I have to think about what I want to say, and then [I have to] think about the words and all that stuff. It’s easy just to talk, half of the time the people you talk to know what you are trying to say anyways.” I believe the ex-offender’s case against the writing is valid; she believes engagement of the critical consciousness makes the process tedious and difficult for a novice writer to grab a handle on the symbols. I also believe that this ex-offender endorses talking over writing because it

provides the space for filling-the-blank types of conversation. Meaning the spoken words plus background information provide the full content of the conversation. Obviously, this approach to communication is easy with a face-to-face dialogue, but in writing, the writer is responsible for filling in all the blanks for the reader. I believe in writing, according to this ex-offender and supporting research, it is this process that discourages writing.

So my attempt to appropriating writing as a process for inventing ethos became a bigger challenge for marginalized groups, both for the ex-offenders and myself. Although I began to understand their claim for resisting writing, as an African raised in a country that treats education as the key to breaking out of the economic, social, and political systems of the world, I found it difficult to believe that the ex-offenders would resist such a powerful tool. I later realized that the difficulty I experience was directly tied to my cultural background as a Sierra Leonean.

While I was in Sierra Leone, I vividly remember the idea of education and its relationship to success been drilled into hearts and the minds of children whose parents had the opportunity to fund their education. To educate a child through primary and secondary education (K-12) in Sierra Leone is costly. At the time I was schooled in Sierra Leone, there were no public schools and parents had to pay school fees, pay for books and uniforms, and also provide lunch for the eight-hour school day. So it was almost as if parents putting a child through school was literally a future investment. Parents expected their children to go to school and become successful men and women who could haul them out of

poverty. For this reason teachers made it their number one priority to engrave the importance of education as the key to success. One of the ways they did this was by having students recite this song, “We are all going to our classes, with clean hands and faces... for learning is better than silver and gold” during the morning assembly, which was every school day. This daily pledge to education reminded us of its importance and why we should honor it.

In later years, I discovered that that song was taught to our Sierra Leonean ancestors by the colonizers. In fact, local historians argue that the colonizers used literacy as a tool to persuade our ancestors to believe that learning, reading the English alphabets, and studying the bible, were indeed better than silver and gold. This knowledge enabled my ancestors to govern the tribes from biblical principles; a practice that demolished the polytheistic worship. Through this, local historians believe that colonizers gained ultimate power to use biblical references to emphasize the importance of learning over silver and gold and through this, the colonizers were able to sophisticatedly rob treasures and precious stones from the indigenous people.

Obviously, this idea of exchanging diamonds for education is no longer practiced in contemporary Sierra Leone. Yet the ideology of literacy as the building block for character and freedom continues. As a matter of fact, while in Sierra Leone, I remember relatives who came home on vacation from the United States would often characterize the U.S. as “the heaven on earth” because of the country’s progressive nature and its high value placed on education. The visitors would often praise America for providing free primary and secondary education

(K-12) to all citizens, including immigrants. This description of America was unbelievable; it is no wonder that multitudes of people seek to come to America because it costs a fortune to educate a child through primary school in Sierra Leone. So when the ex-offenders did not exhibit such a high value for literacy, I was dumbfounded.

Nevertheless, Flower's article "Intercultural Inquiry and the Transformation of Services," brought light to this discussion. She argues that in community engagements, if all the stakeholders (in this case the ex-offenders and myself) are not on the same page, the construction of "conflicts and contradictions" is more likely to arise (182). Thus, to prevent such from happening, I organized the project as a platform for intercultural inquiry. This way, the established relationship between the ex-offenders and me would allow us to frame conversations that would enable us to talk across cultures. According to Flower, operating through this platform would equip the stakeholders to seek for "more diverse rival readings" with the intention to construct "multivoiced negotiated meanings in practice" (182). Thus, I became a catalyst who sought to observe and dissect theoretical and empirical ideologies that would invoke the ex-offenders' mind to rethink literacy.

The approach to understanding the ex-offenders interpretation of literacy began with the class discussions, but I gained a fuller and more accurate understanding of their rhetorical stance to the ideology of literacy through their individual written texts. The piece below is from the outspoken female ex-offender I mentioned earlier. Frankly, the piece is long, and as a result, I have

decided to include an excerpt of the narrative in the body of the thesis; the full length of the narrative is recorded in the appendix. Dina's narrative is compelling and it provides an empirical conversation about the 1954 school integration ruling from a student's standpoint. Also, the piece captures the discussion of dominant ethos and it illustrates how an alternative ethos could emerge when capitalist societies use literacy as the rod to separate instead of the tool to empower those on the margins to move towards the center. In the narrative following, the ex-offender, who I will call Dina, describes social issues that could propel students like her to construct an alternative route in search of the American Dream. She wrote:

Untitled

My childhood was awesome, actually my life was awesome. I grew up, happy and I had everything fulfilled. I went to a catholic school, up until 6th grade. My grandparents and my parents were huge in our lives. My grandmother was a Caucasian lady, so life was even better than my peers. I took dance classes and modern dancing. My brother took karate and we lived across the street from the convent so Father John and my sister were our playmates. They religiously filled up our souls righteously, it like we give it to you, and its up to you to keep it. After 6th grade we ended up going to public schools. The government came up with kids black &

white to integrate and stop racial status that we all knew existed. So my brothers and I and all my cousins in junior high school were all bused to Mosby middle school directly in the project. Anyway school was awful, but I allowed my teachings to keep me focused. There was several incidents and a few fights. I had cousins that fought my battles, they were all so huge, and I was tiny. Anyway, I clearly remember this last situation after school. Every one met at the park, this girl name [S]nookie and I had a date to fight. I wasn't scared because I knew my cousins were gonna be posted. Once everyone got there my cousins told me if I didn't beat her butt, they would beat mine. That's when I really learnt how to fight. My first and last fight...I had few older men attracted to me. They were all financially able. I had to date some to see what their intentions were especially for me. I know prostitute wasn't gonna be my decision. I have a very large family so I believed that would disgrace me totally. So I traveled with my choices. All up and down the highway, from New York, New Jersey, Washington DC, Florida, you name it happened...[Now] in my twenties, smoking weed, chilling with friends and figuring that was the fun thing to do. I was blinded with wealth; I had no goals, no future thought; Nothing but the love of cocaine. Finally, at the age of 50,

along with realizing all of what I should already have
because it was always there.

In the beginning of the narrative, notice how Dina described her early childhood experiences as “awesome.” Dina in class defined awesome as having Caucasian grandparents because unlike her peers, whose grandparents and parents were African-Americans and may not have the opportunity to afford dance and private school, Dina had the investment of privileged education and religious beliefs. Unfortunately for Dina, her downward spiral began after the *Brown vs. Board* Supreme Court ruling. In her narrative, Dina addresses the life problems that resulted from busing and schools integration in the Richmond City school district. A local researcher, Danielle Amarant, wrote an ethnographic article, “The Redevelopment of Highland Park and The Role of the Residents,” in which she recounts the effects of busing to the rise of drugs, crime, and violence in cities across the country. She claims that,

The entire country experienced the confusing, tumultuous times of the 1950s. As integration gathered momentum the invisible barrier that separated Highland Park... was slowly broken down... As schools became integrated it became more common to see black students on the bus lines... it was common for white homeowners to sell their house for a low price... they were under the impression that a black family was moving onto their block. (5)

Clearly, Dina’s account confirms the exegesis of school integration Amarant describes in her research. For Dina, it was the busing system that physically and

rhetorically transported her from her Caucasian upbringing to the Mosby community, where she started to fight for her place among her peers and eventually, within the community. Although in her narrative, she claims that she allowed her teachers to keep her in order, it is evident that the order the teachers established did not stop her from getting pregnant before completing high school; neither did it stop her from constructing the alternative path to riches and fame.

Additionally, her actions leading to pregnancy and the ones following that depict Dina as rebellious and disruptive towards her religious background. It shows that Dina was aware of the limitations posed to her by both her religion and the norms of society; however, she decided to fight her own battles and construct an alternative path. Regardless of the path Dina took in her attempt to construct ethos, it is obvious that her decision to experience the American Dream was not limited to class or religious beliefs. And even though Dina's actions finally caught up with her while she was incarcerated, I believe she used that time to exercise epigenetic process to chart inquiry.

Experimenting the Process

As an African, I thought that my ethnicity would provide the platform to talk across cultures, since a majority of the participants were from minority groups. My assumption backfired because though I am an African, to the ex-offenders, I am an African whose idea of literacy is westernized. So I decided to employ Flower's concept for talking across culture by sharing with the ex-offenders my experience with the Sierra Leonean twelve-year civil war. I explained to them that

while I lived in Sierra Leone, I had different definitions for freedom, depending on current exigency. As I mentioned earlier, I embraced the ideology of literacy because it was the way out of poverty as well as social and political oppressions. But in later years, my definition for freedom was firmly fixed on the ability to express one's thoughts without subjection to alienation from political and social factions. Furthermore, I told the ex-offenders that my definition of freedom then was framed on the fact that spoken words were a determining factor for life or death in many instances. I went on to explain that almost everyone in the country considered their neighbor as potential snitch, since people would say anything, whether truth or fabricated, in effort to protect a life.

The ex-offenders immediate response to my anecdote was compelling. They asked questions like, "How did you survive that?" and, "Who did you tell on to survive?" I simply responded, "no one." Although my response was one word, it opened a rhetorical space for the ex-offenders to discuss in depth the ideology of the American Dream. Apparently, the ex-offenders were drawn to my narrative because a majority of them related my story to the theme of betrayal and survival. One particular ex-offender, an African-American male, whom I considered a radical follower of conspiracy theories, responded to my narrative with this claim, "For some of us, the white-man used our black brothers to put us behind bars. They call it the system, but I call it snitching."

As a way to encourage, yet refrain from focusing solely on racial issues, I directed the class discussion to the ideology of the American Dream by first asking the ex-offenders to define the American Dream as they know it. There

was a long pause and so I decided to define the American Dream by using the metaphor of the salad bowl. After describing the concept of assimilation, it seemed the ex-offenders welcomed the comparison, since all of them were silent. That was not the case; seconds after the long pause, there was an intense conversation that characterized the American Dream as a capitalist system. They attested that the term is used by the dominant as a deceitful mechanism by the dominant to present the American Dream as a free enterprise. The ex-offenders claim this is a deception set forth by the system to encourage marginalized people to think that everyone in the society has a shot at success, regardless of socioeconomic classification.

As a matter of fact, one participant wrote, "There is nothing like the American Dream, it is not real. It is all a set-up." At first it was difficult for the participants to express in writing exactly what he meant by "a set-up." However, through class discussion, he expanded on his written claim by stating, "The American Dream is there to get the black man locked-up." Obviously, this ex-offender was not the only individual who felt trapped by the ideology of the American Dream because immediately after he made his comment, heads in the room nodded in agreement.

As I listened to the men and women talk about their perception of the American Dream, I realized Stuckey's call for dissecting ideology, which is to read the ideology through a historical and cultural context, is missing in the ex-offenders' appropriation. In other words, the American Dream, for the conspiracist ex-offender is a "white man's" tool. Perhaps Stuckey would argue

that misreading or misappropriating the American Dream could result from the lack of agency to contend with and appropriate the ideology. Thus, I believe in reading rhetorical problems, the ex-offenders would have to read it through multiple perspectives instead of a single reading to appropriate the ideology.

Conclusion

When I began this project, my initial goal was to design writing workshop sessions that would encourage the ex-offenders to write their personal narratives. Despite the fact that the ex-offenders were initially resistant to writing, I was determined to discover their reasoning for resisting writing as tool for ethos construction. To overcome this resistance, I invited the ex-offenders to rethink writing as a process for constructing ethos by writing with metaphors. Also, I charted an inquiry to facilitate the writing workshops as an avenue for ex-offenders to contend with and appropriate conversations at the center.

Thus, the objective of this thesis was to 1) illustrate how literacy promote ethos construction for a marginalized group; 2) to demonstrate through the ex-offenders writing samples how they observed and practiced rhetorical strategies that later empowered them as they moved and engaged in dominant discussions; and 3) to elaborate on the employment of literacy as the engine that drives ex-offenders to locate public discourses.

With this in mind, I believe the strength of B&R, as stated in the mission statement, is to rebuild and restore the lives of the ex-offenders and the Highland Park area. I subscribe to B&R's process for community engagement because it provides the ex-offenders the second chance opportunity to rebuild their individual lives, and also to rebuild the life of the community where they may have intentionally or unintentionally contributed to its downward spiral. This concept is groundbreaking because it emphasizes a collaborative process for

building community or a “cathedral,” as Rollins often refers to B&R’s restoration process.

This concept for building a cathedral guided my thinking in my work with the B&R’s ex-offenders. I posited the concept of the second chance as a collective ideology because it best describes the work of the ex-offenders in the reentry journey. Additionally, I believe the success of B&R’s program rests on the fact that the organization provides spaces for the ex-offenders to deconstruct the criminal identity through the access to shared beliefs and common knowledge. For example, Rollins often addresses every member of her staff as family; this includes the ex-offenders who are enrolled in the program. She carries the ideology of family as the cornerstone to situate the conventions of family that would unify the difference between the staff, the ex-offenders, and the volunteers. The phrase “we are family” was commonly used among the members of B&R, and to a degree, I believe the phrase has become a monitoring system that holds its subscribers accountable for both individual and collective actions.

The resulting conversation for “we are a family” posits the understanding for the ideograph of ethos construction. In fact, McGee describes *ideograph* as the employment of particular words and phrases to capture a specific ideological position. McGee sees the use of ideograph as a thread that weaves theoretical and empirical evidence as a way to construct knowledge. I believe his claim supports Scott’s, Burke’s, and Fisher’s work, which deal with the employment of communicative tools to navigate common knowledge. Thus, the vitality for ethos construction is not simply to understand the ideograph, but also to advance the

acquired knowledge through critical consciousness. For this reason, McGee's discussion of the ideograph confirms that shared values provide the lens through which interlocutors infuse and defuse systems within contingents to construct rhetorical dialogues.

Therefore, the focus of my work with the ex-offenders was to invite the participants of the project to rethink literacy and to envision the writing process as a cornerstone for the construction of ethos. Unfortunately, this objective was not easily accepted and so it forced me to examine socioeconomic backgrounds of the ex-offenders as an attempt to understanding the root of their resistance. Since a majority of the ex-offenders identified writing as difficult and task-oriented, this indicated that the ex-offenders' perception of the writing process is equivalent to a life change through conformity or assimilation to the dominant cultures. This was concluded when I discussed the writing process through the lens of cognitive theory, which posits the process begins and ends with cognitive application. That is, the writer has to carefully frame the critical argument while engaging the audience as well as appropriating the environment.

For example, I mentioned earlier that an ex-offender resisted B&R's mock interview classes because they demanded the ex-offenders wear the appropriate dress code. Similar to the ex-offenders' collective case for the writing process, which they claim is difficult, there was one ex-offender who resisted to conform to the demand for appropriate dress code because, according to him, it denoted a fake identity. Thus the ex-offenders interpreted the ideology of literacy as a confined system in that they either conform to the ideologies at the center

through assimilation or completely reject the concept. Accepting the confinement of the ideologies may secure entrance to observe and eventually participate in dominant discourses; however rejecting it would automatically classify and marginalize minorities like the ex-offenders.

A challenge in the project was to discern an authentic starting point, a place where the ex-offenders could contend with and appropriate public conversations. I attempted to discover the entry point through Paula Mathieu's work in *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition*. In the preface of her book, Mathieu introduces the metaphor for sun by referring to it as the beacon of hope. For Mathieu, this emblem is embedded in the human mechanics. For some, the attributes of hope are dazzling from a distance, but for others, it could be deeply buried and may need more effort to raise it to the surface. In describing the sun as a metaphor of hope, Mathieu argues, "the sun (no matter how big or small)," becomes the representation for "all that is perfect, funny, creative, accomplished, skillful-everything that is working in person, community or organization" (xviii). I carried this element of the sun to the ex-offenders project and what I discovered was the need to have the ex-offenders recognize the sun in them and work towards bringing it to the surface.

Though I appreciate Mathieu's use of the sun as a metaphor for hope, the process to identify and magnify the sun individually and collectively among the ex-offenders was a tiring process. It required an overwhelming measure of persistence and the patience to repeat the same process, multiple times until each individual's light bulb went off and he/she grabbed hold of the concept. The

process was particularly fatiguing for me since the ex-offenders often viewed the workshop sessions as therapeutic because they could discuss issues and challenges of the reentry process. For me, however, it was challenging to think that in an hour's session maybe one or two ex-offenders would come to discover the sun in their writing. Keeping them motivated to discover the sun of hope was perhaps the biggest challenge.

Also, I believe the process was fatiguing for me because my interpretation of literacy and the ex-offenders' were contradictory. The logic behind this is tied to the observation I made earlier concerning the attributes of literacy as the two-sides of a coin; meaning on one side, it is empowering on the other side. My understanding of literacy when I started working with the ex-offenders was sponsored by colonial doctrine, which honors literacy as an empowering tool. On the other hand, the ex-offenders' interpretation complemented the Marxist standpoint, which posits the ideology of literacy as violent, an agent for marginalization. The process to enable the ex-offenders to mirror the ideology of literacy without discarding their initial reading of the concept was fatiguing.

I constantly had to change and re-define the project week after week to ensure that the ex-offenders did not leave the class without considering writing, just like the life lab sessions. In a way, I believe the project was a model for the construction of ethos. That is, as a rhetor, I constantly employed and exercised the application of the ethical proof, week after week, to persuade the ex-offenders to stay true to the project's rationale. Regardless of our dissimilar perspectives towards the ideology of literacy, it is evident that the writing project

provided the space for the ex-offenders and myself to contend and wrestle with the ideology. In the end, we, meaning the ex-offenders and I, examined the ideology of literacy from a neutral standpoint and we were also able to identify the dominant.

Moving forward, the ex-offenders excerpts also confirm Ellen Cushman's argument for community engagement in "Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change." She suggests that community projects are agents for social change in that the projects provide rhetorical and physical spaces for participants to invent ethos. She explains that through the spaces, "people in part" are empowered with rhetorical tools, and that it also enables the people to "achieve a goal by providing resources" (15). Perhaps she could argue that the ex-offenders who participated in the writing project employed rhetorical tools, such as the writing process, to freewrite a single thought, which later became the gateway for them to enter and engage in public discourses.

In discussing ideology and literacy, Stuckey clearly positions the politics of literacy as an existing branch within the macro ideograph of the American Dream. Her argument is that the ideology of the American Dream contains sub-branches or ideographs such as, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Hence, the collection of these ideographs when appropriated could either marginalize a minority group or empower the group to move towards the center of dominant discourses. If the latter is true then, it could create awareness for the marginalized group to contend with and appropriate the conversations at the

center through the praxis of rhetoric and the conventions of the hidden persuader.

The ex-offenders excerpts I presented in this body of work confirm the necessity to situate and engage in public forums as the gateway to constructing ethos. David Coogan discusses the concept of public forums as a vital organ in community engagement by expounding on Susan Jarrett's *middle space theory* discussed in her book, *Rereading the Sophists*. In *Sophists for Social Change*, Coogan describes middle-spaces as "productive places to question the commonplaces or ideological statements" (5). The description of middle space then becomes the platform to chart inquiry; the space where marginalized groups and active rhetoricians could flesh out, contend with, and explore ideographs or ideologies to develop a critical and emerging knowledge. Hence, the writing invited B&R's ex-offenders to participate in middle spaces to contend with commonplace topics such as the American Dream and literacy.

In the methodology section, I discussed the effects of busing as a result of the 1950 Supreme Court ruling to terminate the segregation of schools in the United States. The lyrics "learning is better than silver and gold" was another attempt colonizers used to introduce the importance of literacy. One thing I did not mention in that discussion is the inferences that both of these instances are examples of rhetorical fallacies. In defining *rhetorical fallacy*, McGee describes it as a material condition that could employ situated or invented ethos to create a false or misleading vision. He goes on to say describe it as the "eccentric and/or narrow usage of 'ideology,' to construct a "cosmetic camouflage" in attempt to

create a temporary or misleading solution to a problem (458). Both the Supreme Court ruling and the colonizers song were attempts to address rhetorical problems; however, the process in which they decided to combat these rhetorical problems may have been misleading or in McGee words, the “cosmetic camouflage” to secure an expected end; an end that would favor the policy makers (458).

Thus, the two examples I reference above are attempts to create rhetorical fallacies; nevertheless, these attempts constructed a blurry or an opaque view that created rhetorical contradictions. For instance, the school integration ruling could be classified as a blurry attempt to solve the school segregation problem of post-1954. Although the attempt was to solve the racial tension in the country, the possibilities of a backlash were not tackled prior to it launching. Dina’s narrative indicates that the decision to combat segregation tension was not fully understood among marginalized groups. On the other hand, the colonizers’ lyrics “learning is better than silver and gold” for the Sierra Leoneans was perhaps a well-developed, premeditated concept developed to deceive a people to fully purchase the ideologies of the Western world without the choice to agree, disagree, or appropriate the concept. In both instances, the idea of transparency is prevalent; we see that a blurry spot could create a resistance to an ideology, which may limit or deprive the application of an ideology and the advancement of knowledge to all contingent members.

Finally, while on one level I want your final thought of this thesis to grasp the importance of community engagement in the construction of ethos for

marginalized groups, I also want you to think of ways that we could aid and facilitate minority groups to strategically move forward (from an ex-offender to citizenry position) without feeling betrayed, displaced, or misappropriated. Simply put, for as much I want us to grapple with the evolving identities of ethos, literacy, community literacy, and the role of service learning, both inside and outside the university, I also want us to think about the transparency, the blurry or opaque surfaces dominant discourses could inflict whether through the conscious or unconscious use of rhetorical fallacies. For this reason, I believe we (rhetoricians and community organizers) should consider using community engagement or outreach projects as the leading tool to catalyze marginal discourses and to apply expert research to design and facilitate middle spaces dialogues that would aid people on the margins to contend with and also appropriate dominant discourses.

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Appendix A

Syllabus (Modified from Professor Coogan's prison writing syllabus):

Writing Your Story

Modu Fofana-Kamara
Graduate Student
Virginia Commonwealth University
06/10/2009

Introduction:

My name is Modu (Mo-doo) but people call me Mo, so feel free to call Mo if you choose to. The purpose of this project is to help you write your way into a new life: to honestly address where you've come from and where you're going through the art of a personal narrative. I believe that your life is unique, even though you share a lot in common with other people like you, who have also gotten into crime and locked up. Your challenge here, should you choose to accept it, is to make a story from your life to make sense to experience, to pick and choose what readers will see, to teach readers how to see. Because writing a personal narrative is difficult, I will be here to work with you individually and collectively throughout the process.

Class Rationale:

The objective of the course, "Writing Your Story," is to enable the participants to write their personal narrative by weaving life experiences that occurred before, during and after incarceration. The class will be conducted in a workshop format to ensure that the

participants have time to write a portion of their stories during class, and also to provide the space to ask and share experiences about the writing process to an active audience for critical and constructive feedback to assist future revisions. By the end of the six weeks sessions, successful participants who attended all six sessions would have written a minimum of a three-page memoir, which they will read out loud to the entire class during the last meeting.

Class Schedule:

The following categories are the basic areas you would use as you write about your life before, during and after prison.

Week 1: The Past/Problem

1. In two sentence describe your past experience or relationship with writing
2. Carefully observe an object in the room, use the object as metaphor to describe the world the use to live in, the world they live in now, and the world they hope to live in the future.
3. Describe significant people (friend, family, e.t.c.) in your life.
4. When did you start to get in trouble?

Week 2: During/Punishment

5. What are the factors of your crime?
6. How and when did you get caught?

7. Have you learned anything from the experience of being punished

Week 3: Future/Possibilities

8. What sort of things do you struggle with now?
9. What's your vision of yourself in relation to other people?
10. What do you think you can offer others, and what would you like in return?

Week 4: Peer Review

Week 5: Revision

Week 6: Reading personal narratives in class

Appendix B

Hamed's Piece

From the depth of darkness into the light: one must shine

On May 6th 1954 a man-child was born to a mother that enjoyed the pleasures of life and was not ready for motherhood. By her not been ready, it caused this child to become a transitional object within his family. First to an aunt who was struggling with her own family so accepting this child was love but she did not realize the cost was too much. He was later given his grandmother. At an early age the child was not aware of who his real mother was. So the grandmother became mom. She was delighted to have this child and she loved and spoiled this child. The child had his own room and whenever he feared darkness, mom disliked it but she was there to comfort him. Due to mother's wit, it was sensed that this child was different she taught the child the Bible. So from that time, the child became a seeker of knowledge. He excelled in school.

Nightmares became frequent in this child's dream and many said that it was because the child had so much anger inside that is why he was having nightmares. Others said that the nightmares were because the devil was trying to win the child over. From that time, the child's behaviors began to change. He fought with his cousins, skipped school and eventually became a problem for his grandmother. So his family decided to move him with an aunt who also loved this

child dearly and exposed him to other facets of life. This child was reared in the rural area, but now he is in the city.

He began school and had to make new friends. It was tough for him at first because he also had to prove himself to new friends. This was the beginning of this child's downward spiral. He began to come in contact with the law; he began to do crime, not out of need but to belong with his peers. Drugs were introduced to this child at an early age so he break into wealthy people's home. Also he stole from value stores. What started as profit soon became a way to support the drug usages, which has become a habit. The child soon became a teenager and the police caught him and this time, he had to learn about the justice system. His first encounter with the system he was dealt with injustice. He had never been in trouble with the law before, so instead of giving him probation, he was sent to penitentiary for six years.

Once he overcame the fear, the teenager wanted a reputation so he formed a gang group in prison. Gang members were all young so their attraction was to learn how to become better criminals. This teenager was angry at the system so his plan was to prey on society. So while he was still in confinement, he rebel[led] against all the rules. He could have come home in eighteen months, but he ended up doing four years instead of six. At that time, the kid was really angry.

So once he was released from prison, he continued to commit crime. About a few months after his released he was introduced to the federal system, which is totally different from the local system. The kid robbed a bank. At this

time, his mind set was different; he began to learn about something different from crime. He started seeking for knowledge. Once released from prison, he tried to live according to society standards but it lasted for a short time. Drugs usage was now a lifestyle, and this became a revolving door for this kid, a vicious system that kept him in and out of prison. Drugs program helped him to realize that his addiction was a disease. So for many years, he was a seesaw up and down with his life. Gaining and losing. Then he had his last run with the law. He made a conscious decision to be honest so himself and deal with his inner problem. With the help of others, the man begin to view the world different. He was transformed from one side of the spectrum to the other was [even though it was] not an easy task. So now that he light is drawing him to take an opportunity to give back by helping a community that is down trodden and drug infested.

Appendix C

Dina's Piece

Untitled

My childhood was awesome, actually my life was awesome. I grew up, happy and I had everything fulfilled. I went to a catholic school, up until 6th grade. My grandparents and my parents were huge in our lives. My grandmother was a Caucasian lady, so life was even better than my peers. I took dance classes and modern dancing. My brother took karate and we lived across the street from the convent so Father John and my sister were our playmates.

They religiously filled up our souls righteously, it like we give it to you, and its up to you to keep it. After 6th grade we ended up going to public schools. The government came up with kids black & white to integrate and stop racial status that we all knew existed. So my brothers and I and all my cousins in junior high school were all bused to Mosby middle school directly in the project.

Anyway school was awful, but I allowed my teachings to keep me focused. There was several incidents and a few fights. I had cousins that fought my battles, they were all so huge, and I was tiny. Anyway, I clearly remember this last situation after school. Every one met at the park, this girl name [S]nookie and I had a date to fight. I wasn't scared because I knew my cousins were gonna be posted. Once everyone got there my cousins told me if I didn't beat her butt, they would beat mine. That's when I really learnt how to fight. My first and last fight.

Now I am in high school and it good. I graduated; I had a high school sweetheart. I dated the same guy four years of school. The winter before

graduation, [him] and I conceived, and a couple of months after I graduated the pregnancy never stopped me from going to school. After giving birth to my son, it likes some type of womanhood. I felt I was more matured than [he], and at that time, I had no problem dismissing him out of my life.

I dismissed [him] because throughout my immaturity as a child, I matured, and overnight allowed my teachings to set in. then after having my child I felt even more matured than him. That time, I knew I need an older; a smarter and wiser man to provide for me and my kid.

And to answer the question, did I love [him], I assumed the high school sweetheart phrase I believed that what we had until I became a mother. Then my dreams sat in my brain, right way and to fulfill them, instead of dreaming I moved forward, immediately.

I had few older men attracted to me. They were all financially able. I had to date some to see what their intentions were especially for me. I know prostitute wasn't gonna be my decision. I have a very large family so I believed that would disgrace me totally. So I traveled with my choices. All up and down the highway, from New York, New Jersey, Washington DC, Florida, you name it happened.

I then received rumors from my family members that these men were transporting drugs and may want me to be a mule. I don't believe it. Because I had no knowledge or no conversation of the sort. I had two guys, I was charmed by them both. Being with both of them was easy because they both travel a lot. They bought me diamond, cloths. They cared and supported my kid and me. It was wonderful for years with me going back and forth. One of the fellows got

arrested in New York. So the choice was easy. I never was introduced to Bernard drug world. He admitted we traveled back and forth DC. Some days twice a day. I was living large.

I am now in my twenties, smoking weed, chilling with friends and figuring that was the fun thing to do. We were also going to disco clubs. So then swallowing acid was even better, we jammed to the music, the disco ball lights and we laughed, drunk and party every weekend. The weed was weekdays, and acid was weekends. We achieved hangovers and upset stomachs. Keeping it moving I didn't think of it as a trouble. It was fun to going shopping and getting ready to go again. In my mind, we had a ball. Me and my girls were dating most guys, the fliest cars, the guys with the most money. They wined and dined us in the most fantastic places. They took us on trips, so we were the girls everyone wanted to be. I never wanted to stop. As years past, it increased to more serious drugs. Luckily, I had already had a pattern of the good life. The choice of a man to choose, and my expectation and wants got bigger. I was surrounded totally with good life.

I then needed knowledge and wisdom for advancing my own. I got attracted to an older man that was already situated in every topic. So now I am use to great life, once I started dating the older men I wasn't with my girls as much. I began isolating myself and being closed in with his request and desires. I am now doing the popular drug called cocaine. I enjoyed how it makes me feel. It just light ups everything.

I was blinded with wealth; I had no goals, no future thought; Nothing but the love of cocaine. Finally, at the age of 50, along with realizing all of what I should already have because it was always there. So I truly know it will be received and achieved because I am truly used to it all. It's not like I am dreaming for the best, I only know the best. I know I have a wonderful companion, financially able, but my past thoughts are no longer there. This time I am struggling with my own finances, saving it just to achieve my future from scratch. I am blessed, I have a strong back up plan and I am gonna achieve my own. I have just started here at Boaz and Ruth which is doing something. I need all my life and I thought I have everything to realize I had nothing. The thought is 'the best is yet to come,.' For me life begins at age 50 and God knows that I have my life and I treasure and value Boaz and Ruth's program.

I intentionally volunteered my time for 6 months before I signed a contract to the program. That has given me a wonderful opportunity to meet wonderful staff members, and different people from all works of life. The different works here like 'life labs' helped me to adjust to the job force. I entered to receive and achieve all there is for me to learn, and I am ready to transition myself into the society, preferably having my own business or by becoming some a staff. I know that I am totally qualified for whatever way God leads me. This time, I am allowing him to guide me. I am blessed here at Boaz and Ruth; here is a wonderful place and opportunity for felons and addicts that want to second chance.