

© 2019

Elizabeth Zoe Alexander

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

**IMAGINARIES AND CONTRADICTIONS OF AGRICULTURE AS REHAB IN THE  
CARCERAL STATE: A CRITICAL EVALUATION**

by

**ELIZABETH ZOE ALEXANDER**

A thesis submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Master of Arts

Graduate Program in Geography

Written under the direction of

Kevon Rhiney

And approved by

---

---

---

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May, 2019

# **ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS**

**Imaginarities and Contradictions of Agriculture as Rehab in the Carceral State: A Critical Evaluation**

by **ELIZABETH ZOE ALEXANDER**

**Thesis Director:**  
**Kevon Rhiney**

This thesis examines discursive and material practices of coupling nature with redemption and rehabilitation in the carceral state through sustainability initiatives, particularly agriculture education programs. I explore scholarly and popular debates surrounding the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) and U.S. mass incarceration; sustainability and its ties to agrarianism; and the growing field of “green criminology” and carceral reform, or “carceral humanism” to suggest the significance of their intersections for how we imagine the work of carceral agriculture education programs. I then attempt to historicize literature demonstrating contradictions in the sustainability movement and mass incarceration by evaluating them through debates surrounding the Physiocrats, Thomas Jefferson, as well as commodity fetishism (specifically Henri Lefebvre’s specific reference to fetishizing nature) to explore the debates’ influences and significances, as well as how we might rely on these debates to think about the role of carceral agriculture education programs differently. I then examine four distinct carceral agriculture education programs, how their goals and methods differ or relate, as well as their use of and reliance on agriculture to achieve said goals. From there, I trace a longer history of agriculture at Rikers Island to show the contradictory history of agrarian imaginaries versus humanitarian crises at the New York City jail. Finally, I argue that the example of Rikers should encourage us to consider such programs in the context of reform projects more broadly, as well as look to some of the programs’ aspirations to consider how they can be taken up differently.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to express gratitude and appreciation to my committee Kevon Rhiney, Nate Gabriel, and Robin Liechenko, as well as Kevin St. Martin, whose advice, direction, and seminars made this thesis possible. I am also grateful to the incredible support and community I found in my fellow graduate students at Rutgers who helped shape my thinking and this project over the last year and a half, especially that of: Alana Rader, Thomas Crowley, Gregory Brodie, Tashanna Walker, and Sam Bowden. And finally, the daily conversation and moral support of Jason Maccaroni and the lifetime of inspiration and encouragement from Trudy, Ian, and Jim.

# Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of figures .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>(1) Introduction: Sustaining a System.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Mass incarceration: mass rehabilitation?.....	4
Sustainability: a contentious history of contradictions.....	9
Agrarian narratives: an American theme .....	13
“Green criminology”: tradition and direction.....	16
Carceral humanism: a rebranding project.....	17
Methodology and theoretical frameworks.....	20
Outline .....	23
<b>(2) Fetishizing the Farm: Historicizing the Nature-Valuation Debate .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Nature and production: a dialectical relationship .....	29
<b>(3) Carceral Agriculture Education Programs: One Method to Both Sustain and Oppose the Carceral State .....</b>	<b>33</b>
“Greening the identity of the facility”: the NIC report .....	34
“The deep mystery of nature”: HSNY-Rikers partnership.....	37
Washington State’s “Sustainability in Prisons Project” .....	46
Insight Garden Program: agriculture as a means to “oppose the carceral state” .....	48
Four carceral sustainability programs: drawing comparisons .....	50
<b>(4) A New Agrarianism or Methods of Reform?: Identifying a Historical Pattern of Contradictions Between Carceral Farming’s Claims and Carceral Humanitarian Crises .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Reform and crisis: a condensed history of Rikers Island .....	58
“The island is now a big vegetable garden” .....	61
Comparing archival discourse to today .....	67
Odes to agrarianism and correctional rehabilitation: conflating two abstract imaginaries .....	73
<b>(5) Conclusion, <i>or</i> Discovering and Contextualizing Aspirations .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>82</b>

## List of figures

Figure 1. Cover of NIC report. Source: <a href="https://nicic.gov/greening-corrections-creating-sustainable-system">https://nicic.gov/greening-corrections-creating-sustainable-system</a> .....	36
Figure 2. Title and introductory images from the NYC DOC official archival website charting the history of farming on Rikers Island. Source: <a href="http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/rikersfarm/rikersfarm1.html">http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/rikersfarm/rikersfarm1.html</a> .....	63
Figure 3. The tree farm at Rikers Island. Source: Farrell, W (1941). “Rustic ‘Paradise’ On Rikers Island.” The New York Times. ....	65
Figure 4. Featured photo by Lucas Foglia. Source: "Inside the Rikers Island Prison Garden" (2018). Garden Collage Magazine. ....	72

## (1) Introduction: Sustaining a System

Awareness of a certain statistic (or at least its general parameter) is becoming increasingly widespread: the United States holds only five percent of the world's population but has nearly a quarter of its prisoners (ACLU, 2018).<sup>1</sup> At the current number of 2.2 million people in prisons and jails, a 500 percent increase over the last 40 years, and roughly 6.6 million people under the supervision of adult correctional systems as of 2016, the U.S. is the world's leader in incarceration (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018; The Sentencing Project, 2017). Some version of these statistics, reflecting the alarming state of U.S. incarceration, is an oft-repeated introduction to works across disciplines that aim to present opposition or a mere skepticism toward the practice of mass incarceration.<sup>2</sup> But the reality behind mass incarceration is not just the numbers, it is also a key strategy bolstered by policymakers—both liberal and conservative—to manage the crises that result from exploitation, poverty, inequality, unemployment, racism, class, and gender (Gilmore, 2007; Kilgore, 2015). As a result, and as Michelle Alexander defines, mass incarceration refers not only to the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison (Alexander, 2010, p. 13). The methods by which mass incarceration is used to respond to a seemingly broad and unrelated array of crises are, as explicated by some activists and scholars, made possible due to an overlap between government and a return on investment from an industry in collective “surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems” (Critical Resistance, 2018b). This joint-venture between government and industry is

---

<sup>1</sup> For discussions specifically on rising public awareness of and concern for mass incarceration, police brutality, and their relationships to capitalism see: *Beyond Prisons* podcast Episode 1: Demanding A Broader Vision For Prison Reform, released on April 9, 2017 and Morning Consult *National Tracking Poll*, released on September 1, 2016. In addition, popular releases such as the podcast, *Serial: Season Three*, 2018 demonstrate growing mainstream interest in and concern for the violence and dysfunctionalities of the criminal justice system more broadly.

<sup>2</sup> See: Angela Davis *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003); Ruth Wilson Gilmore *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007); James Jiler *Doing Time in the Garden: Life Lessons Through Prison Horticulture* (2006); James Kilgore *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide to the Key Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time* (2015); Naomi Murakawa *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (2014).

commonly known and summarized as the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC).

As justice studies scholar Judah Schept tells us, the framework of the “PIC” was introduced by Mike Davis in a 1995 article in the *Nation* that has proven useful to leftist academics and activists for “analyzing the growth of mass incarceration; its relationship to changes in American capitalism, including its entanglements with private capital; and its location on a continuum of strategies used by the state for control, detention, and surveillance” (Schept, 2015). The PIC as a concept, therefore, informs us that mass incarceration has not, historically, been a response to rising crime rates (Alexander, 2010; Gilmore, 2007; Murakawa, 2014). While crime itself, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore articulates, is constantly changing; crime is defined as a violation of the law, but “Laws change, depending on what, in a social order, counts as stability, and who, in a social order, needs to be controlled” (Gilmore, 2007). In a useful illustration of this point, Alexander references the War on Drugs, a war that was declared despite steadily declining drug crime and demonstrates that an inverse relationship between incarceration and crime rates is not an anomaly. Yet, the narrative of carceral expansion, crime policy, and policing presents mass imprisonment as an autonomous, inexorable mechanism that in turn constantly requires new strategies to keep up with the demands associated with maintaining a prison population of over two million people.<sup>3</sup>

What I want to contribute, in the following, is an exploration into the rise, contradictions, and potential consequences of one such mass imprisonment-management strategy: sustainability. The concept of sustainability has a contentious history in itself—but the fundamental role of sustainability initiatives in carceral settings is, mostly, twofold: environmentally-cautious infrastructural buildouts and agricultural education programs. While the intentions and benefits of each sustainability initiative differs—for example buildouts might be implemented to reduce damaging environmental resource-use (a notorious problem for prisons) but more importantly, cut costs,<sup>4</sup> while agriculture education

---

<sup>3</sup> The narrative, as this paper argues, is demonstrated across contexts—including corrections institutions’ guidelines, leaders in carceral education, and the media.

<sup>4</sup> The cost-cutting feature of sustainability initiatives is stressed in the National Institute of Corrections “Greening Corrections: Creating a Sustainable System” report that is explored later in this paper.



programs promote rehabilitation and opportunities upon reentry—both are situated in a discourse of betterment, self-improvement, and redemption based on engagement with “green space,” (i.e. nature) whether for the prison (infrastructural changes) or the prisoner (agriculture education programs).

In this thesis, I will trace the historical, contemporary, and discursive context(s) surrounding the use and representations of sustainability and nature for redemptive and rehabilitative purposes for four carceral agriculture education initiatives with special focus on one site in particular: Rikers Island Jail Complex. To focus this examination, I will concentrate on agricultural education programs, as these are most closely correlated to symbols of redemption and rehabilitation and have a strong presence at Rikers. While Rikers Island, (both the jail and the island more broadly) has long been home to various farming projects, the current agriculture education programs, the GreenHouse and GreenTeam, are the result of a partnership between Rikers and the Horticultural Society of New York (HSNY). Despite the programs’ obvious appeal, I draw on archives and critical analyses of sustainability, carceral reform, and philosophies of nature as the only source of value in society, to explore the ways in which carceral agricultural education programs foreground agrarian notions of nature’s capacity to redeem and rehabilitate individuals while obscuring the structural conditions of incarcerating the nation’s most marginalized individuals. I argue that popular social imaginaries of nature and agriculture are taken up through these reformist measures that do little to improve conditions on a recognizable scale. I found there to be an obfuscation in carceral agriculture education programs put forth not only by carceral institutions, but also non-profits, activists, and public media in acausal claims that such programs interrupt the unjust conditions of mass policing and imprisonment. However, ideologies of redemption ultimately help achieve two things: one, legitimize the carceral state in the face of growing opposition by coupling jail-time with “nature” as rehabilitative to those presumed to be deficient in a sense of private property; and two, it naturalizes carceral state expansion, coupling the jail to a form of natural growth. Ultimately, by examining the specificities of the Rikers-HSNY partnership, I recognized a historical pattern in which agriculture education programs that couple nature’s profound effects to rehabilitation, for “misguided

individuals”, persist despite reports and campaigns publicizing ongoing humanitarian crises at the same jail sites.

As such, this project poses a series of fundamental questions: What is sustainability and how have some of its approaches been influenced by notions of agrarianism? How, and why, are agrarian notions of sustainability equated with redemption and rehabilitation in the carceral setting? And what can these perceptions of carceral-based sustainability initiatives reveal about carceral reformism more broadly? This paper aims to address and build on each of these questions in hopes of contributing to the research and literature that deconstructs the internal contradictions evident in sustainability, nature-society, and carceral reform, as well as placing these bodies of literature in conversation with one another, with the ultimate goal to better understand how to intervene in the social and ecological problems each contradiction poses. As such, the goal of the rest of this introduction is to contextualize contemporary carceral sustainability initiatives—particularly agricultural rehabilitative education programs—by tracing and synthesizing its roots in the U.S. carceral state and the evolution of the broader sustainability movement.

### **Mass incarceration: mass rehabilitation?**

In her 2007 book, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, Ruth Wilson Gilmore answers the self-imposed question, “What is prison supposed to do and why?” with the following: “The practice of putting people in cages for part or all of their lives is a central feature in the development of secular states, participatory democracy, individual rights, and contemporary notions of freedom” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 11). She goes on to state that as “institutions of modernity,” prisons and jails were confronted with the challenge to produce stability in an ever-unstable capitalist economy with constantly alternating definitions of crime. Outlining differing theories of imprisonment, Gilmore concludes that each theory is based on one of four objectives: retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, or incapacitation. Retribution is the presumption that imprisonment dissuades criminals from doing again what sent them to prison and the related view of deterrence,

which aims to use incarceration to dissuade spectators from facing the same fate as the criminals (harnessing and encouraging a notion of an “other”). Rehabilitation, where the “unfreedom of prisons provides an occasion for the acquisition of sobriety and skills, so that, on release, formerly incarcerated people can live away from the criminal dragnet (Gilmore, 2007, p. 14).” And the final objective, incapacitation, quite simply, “calculates that those locked up cannot make trouble outside of prison (Gilmore, 2007, p. 14).” Gilmore considers incapacitation as the primary theory that undergirded the unprecedented 1970s and 1980s California prison expansion that was a response to statewide political and fiscal crises. While national carceral expansion is typically attributed to a mix of the theories outlined by Gilmore, this paper focuses on the particular use of that which is considered “green” for the purposes of rehabilitation.

In her brief but pointed book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Angela Davis reminds us that rehabilitation is a central component to the modern-day penitentiary, serving as the distinguishing factor between the old and new methods of imprisonment. Around the time of the American Revolution, Davis notes, imprisonment was not a new concept to the United States nor the world, but it originally served as a “prelude to punishment,” versus its later transition toward detention *as* punishment (Davis, 2003, p. 26). Her articulation of this origin serves as a useful starting point in looking at the discourse and modes of rehabilitation—and their relationships to nature and redemption—in mass incarceration:

As is indicated in the designation ‘penitentiary,’ imprisonment was regarded as rehabilitative and the penitentiary prison was devised to provide convicts with the conditions for reflecting on their crimes and, through penitence, for reshaping their habits and even their souls (Davis, 2003, p. 26).

While the penitentiary was a progressive reform and vast improvement over previous forms of capital and corporal punishment inherited from the English, Davis continues: “However, the contention that prisoners would refashion themselves if only given the opportunity to reflect and labor in solitude and silence disregarded the impact of authoritarian regimes of living and work” (Davis, 2003, p. 27). However, the specific ways in which we understand the intersection between Davis’ description of prescribed self-reflection and “authoritarian regimes of living and work,” or

mass incarceration more generally, has undergone a series of transitions through the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Specifically, scholars have highlighted a theoretical shift that accompanied the rise of mass imprisonment from the 1970s to the 1980s: crime as the result of social problems to crime as the result of poor morality and bad choices (Kilgore, 2015). Holding the perspective of crime being the result of bad choices positions its respective punishment as having the capacity to teach offenders more honorable behavior, maintaining the hyper-individualized assumptions of personal responsibility prevalent in the current era of neoliberalism. This era, coupled with a rise in high-profile violent mistreatment and resulting strikes at prisons and jails across the country ring in an emphasis on reform that reflects a newfound approach to carceral rehabilitation. Critics of these reforms more commonly refer to them as “carceral humanism” or “incarceration lite” (Kilgore, 2014).

The rehabilitative mission laid out in the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Green Corrections Initiative leans, unsurprisingly, toward the side of accrediting one’s incarceration with personal failure rather than wider social problems. The program also affirms and makes clear that prison expansion is to be maintained and is in need of further, ongoing, and *sustainable* support. While green programs aid in expansion, they also serve “some of the most innovative and greatest cost savings solutions” to other issues (Feldbaum, Greene, Kirschenbaum, Mukamal, & Welsh, 2011). The NIC program itself will be further examined in a later chapter, but its fundamental goals help to introduce the conversion of rehabilitation, environment, and incarceration via its stated mission to “increase awareness among corrections professionals about environmental issues related to the practice of corrections and focus attention on the need to make correctional facilities more energy and resource efficient (Feldbaum et al., 2011).” In addition, the initiative, “explores the feasibility of introducing green-collar job readiness training programs in facilities, assessing the capability of correctional industries to adopt ‘green’ practices, and identifying strategies to assess cost saving options for correctional agencies that operate self-sustaining facilities and programs.” This initiative was the product of an already growing resource base of “greening corrections” guidelines and

materials published by the NIC, including a 2011 report titled, *The Greening of Corrections: Creating a Sustainable System*. The report features several exemplary case studies (particularly those showcasing green-collar training programs), one of which is the first of its type: the therapy and rehabilitation-focused partnership between the Horticultural Society of New York (HSNY) and Rikers Island Jail Complex. As I will argue and hope to demonstrate, the move to “green” corrections as represented in the initiatives at the NIC and Rikers Island are the product of a larger context surrounding a discourse of the benefits of nature, agriculture, and their perceived corresponding redemptive, rehabilitative qualities for both citizens and (in this context, specifically carceral) institutions. The citizens who are in need of such redemption, as evident by the statistics of mass incarceration, are overwhelmingly people of color.

As Davis writes, “That it is possible to be targeted by the police for no other reason than the color of one’s skin is not mere speculation” (Davis, 2003, pp. 30–31). Continuing to describe the ways in which “Police departments in major urban areas have admitted the existence of formal procedures designed to maximize the numbers of African-Americans and Latinos arrested—even in the absence of probable cause,” Davis recounts the historical moments where certain groups are highly targeted based on the current conjuncture and definitions of crime—such as people identified as Middle Eastern and South Asian heritage following the September 11 attacks and black people in the post-slavery era who were “integrated into southern penal systems” and imprisoned under the laws in the southern states’ Black Codes (Davis, 2003, p. 31). While the Black Codes were reworked versions of the Slave Codes, they ultimately came to define “southern criminal justice largely as a means of controlling black labor” (Davis, 2003, p. 31). Davis’ reference to Mancini will also be useful in examining discourses of surveilled labor-as-rehabilitative, even when that labor (in the case of many of the horticultural/gardening programs discussed here) is, technically, voluntary. Mancini states:

Among the multifarious debilitating legacies of slavery was the conviction that blacks could only labor in a certain way—the way experience had shown them to have labored in the past: in gangs, subjected to constant supervision, and under the discipline of the lash. Since these were the requisites of slavery, and since slaves were blacks, Southern whites almost

universally concluded that blacks could not work unless subjected to such intense surveillance and discipline (Mancini quoted in Davis, 2003).

In historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's meticulous history of the development of slave patrols and their transformation to modern police forces, to which an adequate summary would require more significant lengths than what can be provided here, Dunbar-Ortiz writes of the laws that granted elite Southern white settlers the authority and legal obligation to patrol runaway slaves. The language and techniques of slave public patrols and volunteer militias is "still employed in police work in the twenty-first century" and "until the 1960s pushback, police had little supervision and routinely brutalized and confined suspects without consequences" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2018). Referencing Martin Luther King's last public speech, geographers Joshua Inwood and Anne Bonds highlight the "mutually dependent geographies of militarism and white supremacy" that are intertwined with racial hierarchies, environmental destruction, and geographies of violence and militarism (Inwood & Bonds, 2016). Looking to the example of the U.S. Justice Department Report on Ferguson, Missouri, Inwood and Bonds assert that "Practices of policing in Ferguson had little to do with crime" and rather relied on the "police department to generate municipal revenues, specifically targeting Ferguson communities of color to achieve this objective" (Inwood & Bonds, 2016). Further, the authors note that the policing practices evident in Ferguson were "produced through and productive of assumptions about black criminality—shored up local racial hierarchies and sustained a system of municipal wealth accumulation premised on the extraction of value from black bodies" (Inwood & Bonds, 2016).

The story of how—and why—an institution built on racialized policing and toxic environmental practices is increasingly presented as socially and environmentally conscious and proactively just is one that warrants interrogation.<sup>5</sup> Grappling with this question, scholars and activists alike have researched and written extensively on prison reform and the rise of carceral humanism. What's more,

---

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed account of the links between policing, incarceration, and environmental justice see: David Pellow *What is Critical Environmental Justice?* (2017) and Laura Pulido "Geographies of race and ethnicity I: Environmental racism, racial capitalism and state-sanctioned violence" (2016).

the literature that abounds on both historical and emerging discursive validation for jail and prison expansion, even (or especially, as Judah Schept demonstrates) when paired with critiques of existing jail and prison conditions, mass incarceration, and the PIC, accentuates the ways in which incarceration is heralded as the ultimate community-minded purveyor of mental health treatment, education, and drug rehabilitation. My goal here is to situate these texts in conversation with literature surrounding the sustainability movement and industry, as well as the environmental and food justice social movements that have also been fundamental in advocating for alternatives to mass incarceration, particularly via food and environmental-based initiatives.

### **Sustainability: a contentious history of contradictions**

To understand the use of sustainability practices in carceral settings, we must examine the historical development of sustainability as a concept. A movement centered around sustainability took hold in the 1980s but, as social scientist and agroecologist Patricia Allen outlines, had long been of concern—originating during the 1700s when enclosures had direct impacts on resource-use and depletion (Allen, 1993a). Long understood as a strategy to achieve optimal social and ecological harmony, contemporary notions of sustainability first took hold under the umbrella term *alternative agriculture*—a movement defined by mounting criticism of the profit-driven, industrial corporate agri-food industry that took hold in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Guthman, 2014). While the alternative and sustainability movements each grew out of opposition to conventional industry, “sustainability” is discernible due to its distinct, careful consideration of resource-use, conservation, preservation, and nontoxic food and work environments (Allen, 1993a).

The influence of the sustainability movement has been undoubtedly far-reaching, culminating in massive industries from green energy to organic agriculture. Much has been written and explored on corporations co-opting and exploiting the values embodied by sustainability advocates to develop and present Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) press and appeal to the growing movement’s consumer base—such as geographer Julie Guthman’s work on biopolitics in the

organic strawberry industry (Guthman, 2014), political scientist Margaret Gray's labor analysis of the "locavore" Hudson River Valley (Gray, 2014), as well as medical anthropologist Seth Holmes' contribution on the dearth of healthcare for organic farms' immigrant workforce (Holmes, 2013). It's important to note that neither the alternative nor sustainable movements are singular, but rather multidimensional with their own internal opposing and inconsistent viewpoints, driven by scholars and activists from a diverse range of disciplines, demonstrating a certain degree of interdisciplinarity. In fact, the term or definition of "sustainability" is so "subjective, contested, and susceptible to highly varied usage" that in 2013, Margaret Gray refused to suggest or attempt a concrete definition. She does, however, "observe that those who use the term usually do so in the spirit of accountability not only to biotic health, but also to community justice (Gray, 2014, p. 129)." The term, she continues, is not typically "applied to a purely individualistic pursuit of justice, health, and self-sustenance," but rather "sustainability arguments derive from larger concerns" like resource-depletion, environmental impacts of human actions (i.e. the Anthropocene), limited supply of fossil fuels, and a "renewed emphasis on how consumers can play a role in promoting smaller-scale farming efforts that are more natural, humane, and community-oriented (Gray, 2014, p. 130)." However, Gray also questions whether popular food writers in the broader alternative food movement, such as Michael Pollan and Eric Schlosser, do advocate a more individualistic approach to sustainability via campaigns that equate personal choice—based on a particular, prescribed approach to eating and shopping—with personal health. This approach, she suggests, should urge us to consider how recurrent concepts like "sustainability" and "local" are used to shame those who "voluntarily" abstain from a certain lifestyle, serving as a powerful sales and marketing tool as opposed to reflecting a movement rooted in social justice. And "more ominously," Gray asks regarding CSR and corporate co-optation of sustainability, "How does the marketing use of this language act as a salve for consumers' bad consciences while shielding them from the reality of poor labor conditions? (Gray, 2014, p. 130)." Gray's work concentrates on farmworkers, but her concerns of the potential obstruction of material conditions by sustainability imaginaries are significant here.



The array of motives and interests surrounding the modern sustainability movement signals a potential contradiction in viewpoints: what are the social versus environmental roles and responsibilities in sustainability? Sustainability has historically been housed in the natural sciences, constructed as a project based predominantly on resource-use and environmental-conservation (reflecting much of the “larger concerns” from Gray’s discussion) (Allen, 1993a). A significant and lasting critique of sustainability and particularly sustainable agriculture, thus, is its indifference for the social relations on which sustainable practices depend and its assertion of returning to a more natural form of production (Guthman, 2014). Such production is often considered to be small-scale and most desirably family-owned and operated, which as Guthman notes, assumes a symbiosis between people and nature and is a nod to Jefferson and Jackson’s vision of agrarianism. Guthman references the organic movement specifically, but her articulation is relevant to the task at hand: “many in the organic movement have come to embrace these elements of the new agrarianism, equating both social justice and ecological sustainability with small-scale family farming (Guthman, 2014, p. 12).” Because of this conceptualization, Guthman argues, “the movement has come to focus largely on *form*, in particular the proportionality of big farms versus small farms.” Instead, as her book demonstrates, “the movement would do better to pay attention to the *processes* of social and ecological exploitation that gave rise to the organic critique in the first place (Guthman, 2014, p. 12).” As the contributions in the collected volume *Food for the Future: Conditions and Contradictions of Sustainability* (1993) express, relying primarily on ecology and environmental-resource use (i.e. the *form*) as a means to comprehensively address social issues, sustainability ultimately fails to accurately consider the social, economic, and political context driving environmental degradation and the opposed *unsustainable* production. *Food for the Future* contributors—including scholars from agroecology, sociology, political science, philosophy, and environmental and food studies—address the material conditions involved in transitioning to sustainable production (with emphasis on a sustainable food system) including limitations based on current socioeconomic conditions.

The development of a production process that advocates “sustainability” by default suggests

that existing forms of production are or have been *unsustainable*—an observation that unsurprisingly has garnered significant attention in itself. As a result, sustainable agriculture has “exploded into people’s awareness, into theoretical dialogue, and into the efforts of government, universities, and nonprofit organizations” (Allen, 1993a). Hence the positive development of sustainable agriculture starting in the 1980s, to which Allen describes was anathema in years prior. But the seminal edited volume contends, albeit with varying approaches, that social needs (consumption, protection, and regeneration) must be met before environmental needs, and cannot be met exclusively via environmentally-focused initiatives (Allen, 1993b).

The significance of agrarianism that Guthman raises in the sustainability discourse, often represented via descriptive monikers like “Green,” is in its encapsulation of our imaginaries and expectations of the social good held and carried by nature. Allen uses agriculture to demonstrate this spectacle, defining agriculture as a human-engineered process that depends on the *social* relations that determine its process. She states: agriculture is *a self-conscious, human productive activity that has always been socially organized and becomes more so as it develops* (Allen, 1993a, p. 2). Rather than being contingent solely on relations between society and environment, agricultural production is also fundamentally based on society’s *internal* relations.<sup>6</sup> Meticulously tracing the dimensions of agriculture in order to demarcate its *sustainable* version, Allen finds that agriculture must be sustainable in order to ensure that we, as a society, can, “provide ourselves with food both now and into the future” in the face of social and economic injustices and crises. Allen further declares, “The understanding that human relations with nature are always mediated through social institutions and systems is central to developing a sustainable food and agriculture system (Allen, 1993a, p. 2).” In the remainder of this chapter, I expand on Allen’s arguments by exploring the contradictions evident in the alternative/sustainable agriculture and food justice movements and industries by consistently asking, “Why food?” Or in

---

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx explicates a similar sentiment in the first volume of *Capital*: “Labor is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature.” He continues, “The elementary factors of the labour-process are 1, the personal activity of man, i.e., work itself, 2, the subject of that work, and 3, its instruments” (*Capital Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy* Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc, 2011).

other words, what attributes do agriculture and food hold that we often consider them synonymous with *nature* or *environment* and external to social relations? While the principal project of examining sustainability in incarceration is not always centered around food, the food justice movement to use food as a means to confront patterns of policing and incarceration signals a certain belief in its potential, while carceral sustainability initiatives do often include an agricultural education and consumption component. Imaginaries surrounding sustainability may be somewhat of a more recent phenomenon, but agrarian imaginaries are deep-seated. To this we might ask: what can agrarianism teach us about romanticizing environmental sustainability more broadly?

### **Agrarian narratives: an American theme**

The display of and campaigns for agrarian ideals is a subject that has been increasingly examined by scholars since the expansion of the alternative and sustainable farming and production movements. Scholars, some of which have already been discussed here, have documented cases of contradicting practices in the alternative production process as such (elitism and exploitation) that reinforce the same structural injustices the movement claims to address (and that are prevalent in the industrial industries) through a return to preindustrial agrarianism. As Margaret Gray documents, in addition to the problematic prioritization of environmental over social actions to develop sustainable and just agriculture, romanticizing small-scale and a picturesque form of agricultural production as inherently superior leads to an abstraction that does not accurately represent material conditions. For example, Gray presents a historical account of the labor conditions in the Hudson River Valley's local food economy by revealing remarkable parallels with its supposed antithesis, industrial farming. Gray's inductive research found that local food advocates in upstate New York campaigned for a more just form of agriculture, specifically one that could provide pesticide-free whole foods without the devastating exploitation of its workers as increasingly visible across the industrial food system. Yet, many of the farms Gray encountered left workforces—made up almost entirely of Latinx—dependent on low-wages, poor living conditions, and isolation from local communities. What's more is that the

small-farm Hudson Valley labor conditions, Gray argues, are a product of national agricultural history; labor and immigration policy; national and global development; and agrarian idealism. Her final argument is for a comprehensive food ethic that does not exclude the lives of farmworkers. Gray's argument for the "the inclusion of labor rights alongside environmental concerns and animal welfare in conversations and activism related to the food movement" offers interesting insight and approach to the proposed questions surrounding "greening corrections" (Gray, 2014). Or, as Allen may have contended, a re-evaluation of the social relations that are already inherent to—and must be foregrounded in—sustainability is critical in debunking its mythological tendencies.

While the first edition of Guthman's critical and extensive study, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*, preceded Gray's book, Guthman's second edition notes the wider development of studies documenting that, "small organic farms are just as likely to exploit labor as large ones" (Guthman, 2014). The addition of the note and its references mark a growing, collective motivation to debunk presumptions of purity associated with agrarianism. The mere title of Guthman's book reflects this premise while the central thesis demonstrates it: due to profit structures under current socioeconomic conditions, California's organic farming industry is only possible (i.e. profitable) with the extensive exploitation of its resources (i.e. labor, intensification of land) (Guthman, 2014). Although often an improvement in comparison to conventional industrial farming, the image of organic farming as a just (environmentally or socially) alternative is, in reality, inconceivable based on the very structure of the wider agriculture industry (Guthman, 2014). With the price premiums of organic agriculture that attract or force many growers to the industry, Guthman reveals that land values reflect previous and expected profitability—which increase at a rate that the majority of growers cannot afford. Thus, in order to maintain operations, farmers must make up for these losses elsewhere, which typically results in substantial wage cuts, intensification of land use, and/or creativity with resource and labor base—a topic that is explored in carceral settings in this paper.

One of the secondary paradoxes Guthman reveals in her book is the discrepancy between

the organic movement's portrayal of California as a long-standing community of small, independently owned farms (as encapsulated by the idea of agrarianism) versus the reality of its big industry, capitalist history. This point is relevant in that it expresses the abstraction of agrarian ideals (in this case the organic farming industry's campaign) that can, like any abstraction, very well lack historical accuracy. The contradictions Guthman discusses at length and the co-optation of "environmentally sustainable" production practices by producers—both industrial and small-scale—is, at this point, so ubiquitous that it's commonly referred to as "greenwashing," or the *selective disclosure of positive information about a company's environmental or social performance, without full disclosure of negative information on these dimensions* (Lyon & Maxwell, 2012). The prevalence of greenwashing in advertising and public relations journals alone marks not only that the practice is familiar but also that navigating its negative connotations is already a project in process.

According to Guthman, surveyors of the organic movement (which may, in this context, also be considered the "food movement" more broadly) tend to agree that it has primarily drawn on five campaigns through the course of its development: alternative production technologies; health and pure food crusades; 1960s counterculture; and modern environmentalism. A fifth influence, however, agrarian populism, equates criticism of industrialization with corporatization. In other words, the agrarian populist view holds that corporations are to blame for the woes of industrialization and the solution is to return to a mode of production that existed prior: the family farm (Guthman, 2014). The concept of "returning" to another era is prevalent in the movement. As Alkon and Agyeman note in the 2011 influential collected volume, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, the food movement tells us that by transforming our food practices, "we can live healthier, more authentic lives while supporting positive social and environmental change (Alkon, Alison Hope; Agyeman, 2011, p. 2)." In their piece, journalist Michael Pollan is (per usual) the straw man, the symbol of the alternative food and sustainability movement that overlooks fundamental limitations and the role of social relations in favor of idealized small family farms and consumers who just make better dietary choices. With this polemic comes a new distinction: the alternative

agriculture movement versus the food justice movement, which will be examined in closer detail in Chapter 3. The sustainability movement's influence over industries, nonprofit organizations, activists, and citizens is extensive, used as both a mechanism to place pressure on big business (as in the case of sustainability's origins) as well as a marketing tactic to appease consumers (evident by CSR traps and "greenwashing"). Now we turn to the specificities of its influence on criminology, beginning with growing sub-discipline, "green criminology."

### **"Green criminology": tradition and direction**

In a 2015 article, sociologist Yvonne Jewkes and geographer Dominique Moran examine the history of the general theory behind 'green criminology' (Jewkes & Moran, 2015). The authors cite a "dramatic growth of interest" in topics that fall under the sub-discipline but note that the literature has been confined to "environmental crime, its investigation and the regulatory and legislative frameworks set up to deal with it, with some attention also directed to processes of alternative and new forms of justice ('green justice or 'eco-justice') devised specifically to deal with environmental offences." This direction, the authors argue, eschew some of the sub-discipline's more traditional concerns and fails to capture "what 'green' means to the established structures and processes of criminal justice" (Jewkes & Moran, 2015). As a result, there is a significant gap in work "which addresses environmental strategies in relation to punishment and even less on the specific ways in which environmental and sustainability discourses reflect, influence, mesh with or, indeed, mask carceral policies and practices" (Jewkes & Moran, 2015). Carceral environmental strategies range from addressing environmental costs of mass incarceration (which has, as mentioned above, attracted some work from largely environmental justice as well as abolition scholars but has yet to gain significant traction), efficiency over opulence, and topics of 'green-collar' training, education, and green care in prisons that have not been foregrounded in theoretical analyses (Jewkes & Moran, 2015). The work on training and education, the authors state, has been limited to evaluation studies, policy documents or scholarly summaries that recount 'success stories' from around the world. While

the authors describe green criminology as a recent and growing field, they also note their own surprise at the sub-discipline's lack of analysis and even general attention on prisons and imprisonment.

As for the use of the concepts and terms “sustainability” and “green” in criminology, green criminologists “claim that the definitions of ‘solutions’ to environmental harm” are created and reproduced by those in positions of power, “who perpetuate injustices over vulnerable populations and along class-based and racially stratified lines and who govern through crime” (Jewkes & Moran, 2015)—much like the definitions of ‘criminal’, ‘non-criminal’, and ‘crime’ as Gilmore asserts in *Golden Gulag* (Gilmore, 2007). Thus, like other forms of carceral reform, green initiatives and “attempts to ‘improve’ prisons through legal or humanizing reforms can make it harder to challenge more fundamental problems or injustices” (Jewkes & Moran, 2015). By focusing one’s “gaze on the pressing topic of prison expansion and the perverse consequences of some of the green initiatives” we can more accurately discern between the marginal effects of such initiatives versus the larger conditions of the carceral state. To do this, we can also draw on critical analyses of initiatives in carceral reform more broadly.

### **Carceral humanism: a rebranding project**

The period of rapidly rising mass incarceration, marked by continuous growth in prisons and jails across the country, was then followed by an era of reform which saw prison admission rates fall by 24 percent since 2006 and jail admission rates down 25 percent since 2008 (Vera Institute, 2018).<sup>7</sup>

This era of reform is coupled with a distinct rise in public opposition, or as James Kilgore states in his 2014 article, “Repackaging Mass Incarceration,” “the rumblings of change in the criminal justice

---

<sup>7</sup> The Vera Institute of Justice published a report in June 2018 analyzing the dichotomy between the U.S. prison population with its reported recent regression, concluding that the “overall decline in incarceration masks distinct trends that vary from state to state and county to county” (Vera Institute, 2018). In other words, while some states have reduced incarceration, others are at all-time highs, signaling continued growth. In addition, Prison Policy Initiative released a report in January 2018 charting the rise in women’s prison growth despite decreases for men (Sawyer, 2018).

[system] have steadily grown louder” (Kilgore, 2014). Kilgore notes the likes of Attorney General Eric Holder, then-President Barack Obama, as well as media commentators and conservative politicians such as Newt Gingrich and former NRA President David Keene vocalizing their opposition to rates in U.S. incarceration. In response to these condemnations (some of which, surprising), Kilgore states: “The official voices of incarceration—politicians, corrections officials, private prison operators, prison guards’ unions and county sheriffs, are exploring changing discourse and cosmetic reform in order to avoid wide-scale systemic restructuring. In the business world, they call this re-packaging” (Kilgore, 2014). The project of re-packaging, Kilgore argues, assumes several forms—the most important of which is carceral humanism, otherwise known as “incarceration lite.” Carceral humanism, as he (very concisely) defines, “recasts the jailers as caring social service providers.” This is done largely by positioning incarceration in parallel with the field of mental health service. The second form of re-packaging is in non-alternative alternatives to incarceration, which “purport to change things but in essence simply perpetuate the culture of punishment.” Kilgore notes that some non-alternative alternatives might be “well-intentioned and have positive effects,” such as therapeutic programs “of dubious value and very little margin of error to avoid reincarceration” (Kilgore, 2014).

Non-alternative alternatives such as therapeutic and education programs, however, can form the backbone of carceral expansion plans. As Schept discovers in the progressive Midwestern city of Bloomington, Indiana (Monroe County), local politicians condemned the PIC while simultaneously fiercely advocating the county’s largest jail expansion plan in history. The expansion proposal prioritized therapeutic and educational services, while following a historical precedent of building for capacity that far exceeded recommendations and projections made by the National Clearinghouse for Criminal Justice Planning and Architecture (NCCJPA), a nonprofit, nonpartisan national research company (Schept, 2015). Schept compares recommendations from the NCCJPA with actual jail expansion development in Monroe County from 1977 to 2015 and finds that while NCCJPA recommended new facilities be built to replace older decrepit ones, the recommendations for new



facilities were roughly equal in size to the original. However, the county continuously built new facilities that far exceeded the capacity of the previous one to resolve issues such as “unsafe and hazardous conditions” that resulted from overcrowding. The county was incarcerating at rates at least double the NCCJPA’s recommendations and had come to justify continual expansion with what he calls “progressive punishment measures” (Schept, 2015).

Before attending local community meetings, Schept had assumed that the “justice campus” proposal was “at least partly the product of calls for punishment and the law and order politics” he had “come to associate with the rise of the carceral state” (Schept, 2015, p. 4). But instead, he was “surrounded by liberal Democrats and civic leaders,” who were also members of the “energetic social service community” and “outspoken progressives” (Schept, 2015, p. 4). The local community leaders that Schept had expected to be “allies in challenging incarceration” were instead “passionately committed to ensuring its local expansion” (Schept, 2015, p. 5). He finds that local politicians disassociated the local conjuncture with what were exclusively national critiques of mass incarceration with the position that continuously increasing the number of people imprisoned locally could be equated with mental health treatment and rehabilitation; while on a national scale, the PIC for the leading local politician was “the shame of this country,” following only Jim Crow and slavery. These findings of “liberal benevolence in the politics of carceral expansion” (Schept, 2015, p. 8) echo Murakawa’s research and challenge us to rethink the ways that reformist programs have historically done more to legitimize and naturalize the driving forces behind carceral expansion than eradicate or even improve the state of mass incarceration in the US.

In theorizing the book’s project, Schept writes, “Despite the power and scope of mass incarceration, little work has explored how communities acquiesce to or contest it,” while more specifically, little work has been done on how the “logics we have come to ascribe to the carceral state may conceal themselves in distinctive discourses in different communities” (Schept, 2015, p. 11). While Schept’s project is to connect the contradictions of a local conjuncture to “structuring logics of the carceral state,” (Schept, 2015, p. 11) my project in this thesis is to examine the ways in

which distinctive *agrarian* discourses and fetishes manifest and conceal carceral logics in the name of offering rehabilitative services.

### **Methodology and theoretical frameworks**

The research presented in the following chapters, as well as the analyses and conclusions drawn, are based primarily on the following sources: published reports from each of the programs and their websites, as well as accounts from their employees and volunteers; public archives (written journalism, podcasts, and video); data and archival materials from the New York City Department of Correction and City of New York; as well as relevant scholarly literature. For each of the programs' own materials I specifically looked for their stated mission statements that would shed insight into their goals and intentions, the ways they connected the benefits of their program to nature and/or agriculture, and the type of organization that maintained the program. For my archival research, I looked for keywords such as 'nature' and 'rehabilitate' to determine whether programs and media attribute the programs' benefits to the presence of nature and/or agriculture.

Based on analyses of these resources, as well as framing my discussion within literature found primarily in the disciplines of geography and sociology and grounded in discourses on political ecology, political economy, and agroecology, I explore how sustainability initiatives are defined in carceral settings, how they develop, and to what, perhaps less evident, means they serve. Drawing on the concepts surrounding "carceral humanism" or "incarceration lite," I argue that while sustainable, "green" programs may improve conditions on the inside, they often do so for only a small population and are not at all indicative of general practices. What's more, initiatives or campaigns that link prisoners to environmental work and activity (i.e. farming and horticulture) have been fundamental to the establishment of the modern penitentiary rather than establishing a new, progressive reform as they are often presented—as we will see in the case at Rikers Island.

Further, in employing a dialectical analysis, I reconstruct the paradigm of nature as inherently morally rehabilitative and situate it in the context of the social relations that produce and maintain

mass incarceration and the PIC. In both developing a comprehensive understanding and using dialectics as a method of analysis, geographer Gillian Hart's 2016 article, "Relational comparison revisited: Marxist postcolonial geographies in practice" has been fundamental. Hart's piece explicates dialectics and dialectical thinking as a form of 'relational comparison,' identifying the 'relational' as a reference to "an open, non-teleological conception of dialectics at the core of Marx's method" that was drawn from Hegel. She contextualizes her explanation in the terms of a "Marxist vs. postcolonialism/poststructuralism" debate that aims to "lay the groundwork" for understanding "resurgent nationalisms, populisms, and racisms in different regions of the world in relation to one another in the era of neoliberal forms of capitalism" (Hart, 2016). For Hart, dialectics, or relational comparison, focuses on spatio-historical specificities and interconnections of mutually constitutive processes that serve as a methodologically useful tool to provide a "comparative analytic." She adamantly affirms that she is not referring to dialectics in the way that "most people think of dialectics as a teleological Hegelian monster slouching inexorably towards an appalling totalitarian 'totality' that imposes uniformity on heterogeneity." Drawing on Bertell Ollman's reading of Marx's interpretation of Hegel, she summarizes dialectics as a focus on "*processes*, not *things*" in which "elements, things, and structures do not exist prior to the processes and relations that create, sustain, or undermine them" (Hart, 2016). We can relate Hart's summary and articulation here to Guthman's critique of agrarian imaginaries in California's organic farming industry, in which Guthman argues, the movement should focus on "processes" (concrete methods of social and ecological exploitation) over "form" (abstract (abstract assumptions of the practices of big farms versus small farms) (Guthman, 2014). And thus, dialectics requires us to ask: "of every 'thing' or 'event' by what process was it constituted and how is it sustained?" (Hart, 2016). Nothing is to be taken in isolation, and as Hart relies on Ollman's reading of Marx, it is the "internal nature of the tie between the parts" that Marx focused on, rather than Hegel's attempts at capturing the "whole" (i.e. Absolute Idea, Spirit, God, Universal, Truth) (Hart, 2016). Dialectics, in Hart's summary, is the study of parts as they relate to each other, the internal contradictions that constitute those parts, and the inherent ongoing change

and transformation that “holds out political possibilities” (Hart, 2016).

When considering the potentials of utilizing dialectical materialism, Hart looks to Bertolt Brecht to reassert that this type of intervention “helps to pose such questions in a manner that makes effective action possible” (Hart, 2016). It is my intent to draw on this reading to pose and address my own preliminary series of questions on the “concepts, abstractions, and institutionalized structures of knowledge” on the subjects of sustainability and agrarian threads in carceral reform. While this project does have elements and moments of critique, in the most fundamental sense I hope to use dialectics to aid in questioning “what kind of changes are already occurring and what kind of changes are possible” (Ollman cited in Hart, 2016). That said, and as Hart notes, dialectical enquiry does not suggest an enquiry that is value-free, but rather “necessarily incorporates ethical, moral, and political choices/values into its own process and sees its constructed knowledges as discourses in the play of power” (Hart, 2016). In addition to taking Hart’s explication of dialectics or “relational comparison” to deconstruct the complex historical and contemporary roles of sustainability initiatives in incarceration, I also look to commodity fetishism—particularly Henri Lefebvre’s articulation in the context of *nature* versus *production*.

And finally, reasserting the goals outlined in the discussion on dialectics, I wish to make a few final, brief notes on language and positionality. On language, I tend to follow scholar and activist James Kilgore’s directive on avoiding the use of stigmatizing language: most namely words such as *convict*, *inmate*, *felon*, *probationer*, and *parolee*, as well as *ex-offender*, *ex-prisoner*, or an “ex-anything.” Instead, Kilgore uses the following terms that, he argues, better humanize: formerly incarcerated person, individuals on parole, etc. (Kilgore, 2015, p. 3). On this practice he refers to Eddie Ellis, who asserted that words “are of fundamental importance to the process of public opinion formation, positive media images, effective social service delivery and, most importantly, progressive policy change” (Ellis cited in Kilgore, 2015 p. 3). Kilgore also notes the importance of avoiding “succumbing to the gender binary, especially in discussing the population of men’s and women’s prisons,” as transgender and gender non-conforming people suffer discrimination, inappropriate categorization after arrest,

and violent neglect in excessive incarceration (Kilgore, 2015, p. 3). That said, discussions on terms that both humanize prisoners while simultaneously not obscuring the brutal realities of imprisonment are abundant and differ. For example, Journalist and previously incarcerated person Keri Blakinger's tweets on the topic encourage the use of "prisoner" over "incarcerated person": "Unpopular take: As someone who did time, I prefer the word prisoner over incarcerated person. To me, the latter obscures the brutality of imprisonment. The system and often society as a whole doesn't treat us like people and I don't want to pretend that it does" (Blakinger, 2019). In my attempts to both support and respect prisoners while not glossing over their lived realities, I tend to vary between "prisoner" "incarcerated person" or "detained person."

Because of the research limitations to written (i.e. published) materials, the reflections that follow do not include the takes of the people who are and have been directly, and most, impacted: those both previously and currently incarcerated, those on probation or parole, as well as their friends, families, and communities. While there is certainly a number of published interviews and commentary from these folks directly, they are more often than not presented to support the argument of a third party, to which the context of such conversations is rarely disclosed. For this reason, it is not my intention to provide direct affirmation nor opposition to the initiatives, programs, and experiences discussed here. In addition, and following calls predominant in *Black Geographies*, I aim to avoid conducting a racial analysis that rests solely, or even primarily, on black suffering. Rather, it is my aim to explore the programs and initiatives' representations, discourse, and historical context, ultimately questioning the various ways in which they currently are and potentially could be utilized.

## Outline

In the following chapter, I continue to build on the literature and historical context of the U.S. carceral state and sustainability movements by examining a deeper history of the "nature-valuation" debates, from the Physiocrats to Henri Lefebvre's reading of commodity fetishism to disentangle the

contradictions between imaginaries of nature as the source of all value versus the social relations that mediate nature-society relations. Ultimately, the goal of Chapter 2 is to further a dialectical analysis that, as Hart urges, focuses on “processes, not things” (Hart, 2016). Chapter 3 examines four general examples of agriculture education programs, focusing on the Rikers-HSNY partnership but including other initiatives such as: the NIC report; the Washington State Department of Corrections, “The Sustainable Prisons Project”; and the San Quentin State Prison-Planting Justice partnership as discussed and theorized by food justice scholar Joshua Sbicca. Chapter 4 deepens the historical context and analysis of Rikers-HSNY’s partnership by charting the history of farming and progressive reform at Rikers Island since its opening in the early twentieth century. And finally, the concluding Chapter 5 discusses the implications of sustainability projects, particularly agricultural education programs, and how, despite some of the obvious oversights and obscurities they may encourage, how we can understand their positive contributions in relation to other forms of organizing, particularly that of Transformative Justice (TJ).

## (2) Fetishizing the Farm: Historicizing the Nature-Valuation Debate

As we saw in the previous chapter, when Guthman criticizes the organic farming movement for its “new agrarianism” (“new” referring to *reinstating* a philosophy advocated in Jeffersonian democracy) that equates “social justice and ecological sustainability with small-scale family farming,” she points to the movement’s misguided emphasis on *form* over *process*, which also resembles Hart’s reading of dialectics (and her call to analyze “processes” over “things”) (Guthman, 2014; Hart, 2016). Taking Hart’s more detailed explanation of how to utilize dialectics as a methodology and Guthman’s application to agrarianism specifically, this chapter further deconstructs some of the historical concepts and ideologies that have been fundamental to agrarianism that have ultimately transferred to and helped to establish certain imaginaries and assumptions of coupling nature with personal redemption and rehabilitation in carceral agriculture education programs. In this chapter I trace some of the historical discussions surrounding the “nature-valuation debate,” or in other words, debates on whether value (referring to both economic and social livelihood) is the product of *nature* or *social production*. This chapter builds on Allen and Guthman’s critiques of sustainability and organic agriculture, respectively, to expand the historical and theoretical frameworks of the problematics associated with coupling nature with the source of inherent value which, in this case, then seemingly lends it the capacity to redeem and rehabilitate society’s most marginalized citizens.

The chapter starts off with an examination of the eighteenth-century French economic philosophy, *physiocracy*, as it forms much of the foundations of foregrounding form, or things, over processes specific to agricultural production (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010; Lefebvre, 1991). The purpose of this discussion is to juxtapose both the ideologies and critiques of the physiocrats with ideologies and critiques of the contemporary sustainability movement (as examined by scholars like Allen and Guthman in Chapter 1) to show their similarities and underpinnings in the “nature-valuation debate” as well as their combined historical significance on contemporary imaginaries of carceral agriculture education programs. From there, I compare the philosophies and critiques surrounding the “nature-valuation” debate to the Jeffersonian image of an ideal, agrarian democracy

(following Guthman's references and formulation of a "new agrarianism" in Chapter 1) as well as Henri Lefebvre's discussion of commodity fetishism applied specifically to imaginaries of nature. Lefebvre's reading of commodity fetishism specific to nature helps us further bridge the ways in which the nature-valuation debate obscures social processes (i.e. contradictions in social relations) in favor of romanticizing a perceived capacity of nature itself. In Chapters 3 and (especially) 4, I examine specific representations and discourses of nature vis-à-vis carceral agriculture education programs through these arguments to consider Hart and Guthman's calls to decouple the "form" or "thing" from its constitutive "processes," or in this case the carceral agriculture education program from the PIC. It is, however, important to recognize that other theories and approaches of seeing and understanding nature (e.g. nondualist views, feminist views, urban natures) abound and would almost certainly be applicable and useful in this analysis in future development of this work. However, at this time they are not touched on here.

### **Locating the source of all value: the long lineage of agricultural exceptionalism**

Greek for "rule of nature," physiocracy held a certain "sensitivity to nature's purposeful behavior as the true basis of knowledge and social life" (Riskin, 2003). As the true basis of knowledge and social life, agriculture was considered to be the source of all wealth and value. In turn, agriculture was deemed exceptional by social and legal regulation maintaining that "government policy should not interfere with the operation of the natural economic laws" ("Physiocrat | Definition of Physiocrat by Merriam-Webster," 2019). In a 2003 article, Paul Burkett reviews basic elements instilled by physiocracy while arguing that it continues to inform contemporary nature-valuation debates. That is, debates on whether the source of value can be or is derived solely from nature or social relations (particularly social relations of production). Taking Marx's critique of the Physiocrats as his primary method of analysis, Burkett underscores that Marx critiqued the Physiocrats not for "emphasizing nature as a source of wealth or use value but for conflating capitalist value with its natural basis" (Burkett, 2003). Under this conflation, the Physiocrat philosophy demonstrates a misrepresentation



of labor relations as existing exclusively between man and nature, where exchange value is equated with use value devoid of capitalist social relations. Value, therefore, according to the Physiocrats, exists inherently within natural materials and reveals itself upon the cultivation of that material. As Burkett asserts, “the Physiocrats did not critically analyze capitalism’s own form of wealth valuation, that is, did not consider ‘value’ in historically specific, social-relational terms” (Burkett, 2003). Thus, “As a result, they confused the natural substance of real wealth with capitalist ‘value.’” The Physiocrats understood the nature of value to be distinct from the social organization of production, and rather as that which is found in “material things, such as land, nature, and the various modifications of these material things” (Marx cited in Burkett, 2003). This view, Burkett argues, has specifically informed two contemporary, broad positions on nature’s value. The first of which, he states are evident in certain threads of “eco-Sraffian” and “eco-Marxist” theorists who “argue that monetary exchange values (prices and profits) largely or fully represent the values extracted from nature in general” (Burkett, 2003). The second broad perspective influenced by the Physiocrats, according to Burkett, “focuses on nature—especially low-entropy matter and energy—as an objective condition or basis for value defined as psychic income or ‘enjoyment of life’” (Burkett, 2003). While Burkett argues that Marx’s own critique of the Physiocrats is directly applicable to understanding the contemporary debate between these two general perspectives, he also stresses that it has gone largely unnoticed.

The significance of Burkett’s argument that eighteenth-century physiocracy has lasting influence is substantial for at least two reasons. First, it quite directly argues that physiocracy still informs contemporary perspectives on our assumptions and imaginaries of nature as the source of value (both economic and moral i.e. “enjoyment of life”) and its capacity to redeem and rehabilitate individuals. The second way in which Burkett’s analysis is significant for the current project is that it allows us to situate the contemporary debate on the social versus economic value of nature in its historical context. In his critique of the physiocrats, Burkett asserts that the two contemporary ecological economy perspectives also do not “adequately consider the relations between use value

and capitalist valuation” (Burkett, 2003). The result of such a mistake, according to Burkett, is an uncritical analysis of “market forms of nature valuation” (Burkett, 2003). The conclusions of the two broad positions Burkett outlines pose certain questions that can provide theoretical guidance and methodological direction going forward. For instance, we can now ask: How is the historically-influenced nature valuation debate represented or played out in popular imaginaries and discourses? And how might our interpretations and assessments of those milieus transcend if we approach them through the lens of this historical debate rather than an ideological given? These are questions that we can keep in mind as we examine the roles of environmental and agricultural-based programs in jails and prisons.

Before further exploring the extent to which the nature valuation debate (as advocated by the Physiocrats almost 300 years ago) is present in popular imaginaries and discourses, we should first examine the trajectory from a misguided economic analysis to a public ideology—as well as identify the significance of that ideology. With this we can review Allen’s critique of sustainability as discussed in Chapter 1, which demonstrates physiocracy’s enduring influence on perspectives of nature-society relations and holds a certain resemblance to both Marx’s critique of the Physiocrats and Burkett’s analysis of ecological economy. In asserting that no form of “sustainability” or use of resources is without some degree of human engineering, Allen insists that “it is important to understand that we are working in a situation in which both nature and society have been developed, produced, and reproduced by the ideas and activities of human beings” (Allen, 1993a, p. 4).

Referencing the seminal texts *Uneven Development* (1984) by Neil Smith and *Sustainable Development: Exploring the Contradictions* (1987) by Michael Redclift, Allen asserts that the environment is not an external entity but rather is a “process that is the result of relationships between physical space, natural resources, and economic forces” (Allen, 1993a, p. 3). A philosophy that holds nature as the source of all value fails to disentangle the role of “human engineering” (Allen, 1993a, p. 4) in both the production of nature and the production of value, and instead understands nature as an autonomous, external entity with the inherent capacity to influence social relations. As Allen and

Guthman explicated on sustainability and organic agriculture, respectively, when we fail to de-couple nature from the social capacities that we assign it, we are left with a “new agrarianism” (a reincarnation of Jeffersonian agrarianism, as Guthman describes) that equates social justice and ecological sustainability with simple engagement with nature. A prime example of this simple engagement with nature is, as we have seen, the farm. In a letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington in 1787, Jefferson wrote, “Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness” (*From Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 14 August 1787*, 2018). When agricultural programs are considered to be the bearer of all value (both tangible in the sense of ensuring monetary wealth and abstract in the sense of producing integrity), we come to associate a sense of purity to them. What’s more, if all that is needed to achieve “real wealth, good morals, and happiness” is the farm, it’s understandable why we would prescribe it to those “misguided individuals” in the penitentiary whom we assume are in need of redemption and rehabilitation to get on the right track. But this ideology is not only based on an imagined abstraction, it also helps to legitimize the carceral state and its expansion by coupling jail-time with nature, that is, the opportunity to obtain “real wealth, good morals, and happiness” for those who, if they only had prior agrarian experiences, would have made different choices.

### **Nature and production: a dialectical relationship**

Following the above explorations into physiocracy (and its ties to American agrarianism), I’d like to now return to some of the concepts put forth in the nature valuation debate to examine how Henri Lefebvre uses the theoretical framework of commodity fetishism to demarcate between *nature* and *production* to further disentangle the obfuscation of “nature.” While keeping in mind the topics surrounding agrarianism, as well as the more contemporary literature on the contradictions in sustainability, we can draw on Lefebvre’s analysis of nature versus production to further consider some of the ways in which sustainability and agriculture (as examples of the “natural”) are perceived as inherently delivering and foregrounding social justice. Lefebvre’s argument and analysis is part of a

larger project that partly aims to take a series of concepts that have been vaguely (and according to his analysis, imprecisely) deemed *concepts of production*, and “restore their value and to render them dialectical, while attempting to define with some degree of rigour the relationship between” the following: ‘production’ and ‘product’; ‘works’ and ‘products’; and ‘nature’ and ‘production’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 70). By tracing some of the fundamental moments of Lefebvre’s argument, coupled with and compared to commodity fetishism, particularly in his discussion of ‘nature’ and ‘production,’ we witness additional identifications and distinctions made between all that is assumed and encompassed in the *natural* versus that which is *produced* by human labor.

Lefebvre distinguishes between ‘nature’ and ‘production’ by applying Marx and Engels’ theoretical work on commodity fetishism to each concept, ultimately demonstrating the view that *products* obscure and mask the social relations embedded in their production, but elements of the *natural*, at first glance, hold a sense of purity and honesty. Or as Neil Smith similarly articulates, nature presents itself in the realm of use-values, rather than exchange values—even after the object of nature has been commodified (Smith, 1984). On the observed “honesty” of nature, Lefebvre writes: “Nature presents itself as it is, now cruel, now generous. It does not seek to deceive; it may reserve many an unpleasant surprise for us, but it never lies” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81). This observation, while a mere sliver in a thorough demonstration and argument on the production of space, serves as both a reference and starting point in relating commodity fetishism to the current project. Lefebvre follows up this observation with a reading of Marx: “merely to note the existence of things, whether specific objects or ‘the object’ in general, is to ignore what things at once embody and dissimulate, namely social relations and the forms of those relations” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81). He continues: “When no heed is paid to the relations that inhere in social facts, knowledge misses its target; our understanding is reduced to a confirmation of the undefined and indefinable multiplicity of things, and gets lost in classifications, descriptions, and segmentations” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81). How we view and understand the value of the objects of nature has a direct effect on how we understand social organization. But here we can consider nature in the form of objects *or* space: relating commodity

fetishism to the nature-valuation debate, Lefebvre insists that we have come to fetishize space in much the same ways that we have, as Marx expressed, fetishized commodities. But the question remains: *when*, and how, do we conflate our associations and understandings of the natural with the processes embedded in products? Or in other words, when, precisely, do processes deemed to be ‘natural’ obscure the same social relations we generally (and exclusively) attach to commodity (i.e. ‘products’) fetishism? One such obvious example that both Lefebvre and Smith present is that of the national park; a clear representation of a complex amalgamation of the natural and the produced, or as Lefebvre notes, “The fact is that the once-prevalent characteristic ‘natural’ has grown indistinct and become a subordinate feature” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 83). The analysis of social relations in these contexts, therefore, becomes increasingly more challenging.

In the first volume of *Capital*, in a section titled “The fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof” Marx begins: “A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood,” but in reality it abounds in “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx, 2011, p. 81). When an object is a “value in use” it is not yet a commodity but rather addresses a particular use, and so as such, “there is nothing mysterious” about it (Marx, 2011, p. 81). But when that object in use is presented as a commodity for *exchange*, “it is changed into something transcendent” (Marx, 2011, p. 82). When an object is exchanged it is, in Lefebvre’s summary, now a thing and product that is measured, “that is to say reduced to the common measure of money” and “do not speak the truth about themselves” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 80). Continuing for a moment longer with Lefebvre’s summary, commodities:

“use their own language, the language of things and products, to tout the satisfaction they can supply and the needs they can meet; they use it too to lie, to dissimulate not only the amount of social labour that they contain, not only the productive labour that they embody, but also the social relationships of exploitation and domination on which they are founded” (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 80–81).

A commodity, thus, masks the original source of its value: the socially necessary labor time that it

takes to produce it. When a commodity is “fetishized” it presents itself as an autonomous object and therefore not subject to the details of social organization and exploitation (i.e. relations of production).

The result or consequence of fetishizing nature (or in this particular case, the farm/jail-based garden) affects our understanding in that it “is reduced to a confirmation of the undefined and indefinable multiplicity of things, and gets lost in classifications, descriptions, and segmentations” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81). Here we can think back to Guthman’s analysis of organic farming and *form* versus *process*. When an organic vegetable is offered for exchange, our understanding of it is reduced to an abstract concept: organic. One could argue the ways in which ‘organic’ could be well defined and articulated as a summation of its concrete elements, but as Guthman argues, this is not what typically occurs. Instead, our understanding of ‘organic’ is reduced to, in Lefebvre’s words, an “indefinable multiplicity of things,” lost in “classifications, descriptions, and segmentations”: picturesque images of a family-run farm, little to no hired employees, significantly less (if any) machinery, absence of chemical-use, nostalgia for a previous method of production. The *form* is the abstract, the ideal. Yet the *process* encompasses the functions, the forces of production. I’d also like to note that commodity fetishism is distinct from that of *alienation*, which states that, “Objects in themselves are external to man, and consequently alienable by him” (Marx, 2011, p. 99). Placing alienation as the fundamental problematic of commodity fetishism can very well lead to proposing a resolution that simply encourages the production of one’s own products—potentially leading us back to the philosophies behind small-scale agrarianism. But how does the nature-valuation debate and commodity fetishism relate to the social imaginaries of agriculture and sustainability specific to incarceration? The cases that will be examined in the following chapters will begin to draw on this relevance more directly.

### **(3) Carceral Agriculture Education Programs: One Method to Both Sustain and Oppose the Carceral State**

Up to this point, I have explored historical and theoretical underpinnings, as well as some of the contentions, of mass incarceration, sustainability, agrarianism, and the nature-valuation debate in order to begin conceptualizing the role and work of carceral agriculture education programs in the context of the PIC and mass incarceration. Now, I will examine four carceral sustainability initiatives that are particularly focused on using agriculture education as rehabilitation: the NIC report, “Greening Corrections: Creating a Sustainable System”; the Rikers-HSNY partnership; the Washington State Department of Corrections “The Sustainability Prisons Project”; and the Insight Garden Program at San Quentin State Prison. I rely primarily on the websites and published reports of each program to analyze and compare their stated intentions (often stated in “mission statements”), philosophy of nature (often referenced in descriptions of the programs’ practices and benefits), and concrete practices of achieving stated goals via stated philosophy. The focus of this chapter is, ultimately, on the Rikers-HSNY programs, with the fundamental purpose and goal to situate the Rikers-HSNY programs in a national context and conversation of carceral agriculture education initiatives. In Chapter 4 I then expand on the history of farming and gardening initiatives at Rikers Island and describe a historical pattern of contradictions in the claims of carceral agriculture programs versus actual jail conditions.

To deepen perspective on the national context of carceral agriculture education programs (in order to better understand the history of farming and gardening at Rikers Island specifically), this chapter examines some of the similarities and differences of four sustainability initiatives whose approaches to and intentions of using such programs are (at least) occasionally conflicting. Each initiative is maintained by distinctly different types of organizations, including a U.S. government agency (NIC report); a nonprofit horticulture society (Rikers-HSNY); a partnership between a state DOC and liberal arts institution (the Washington State Department of Corrections “The Sustainability Prisons Project”); and a food justice organization (the Insight Garden Program at San Quentin State Prison). While the specific intentions and methods of each initiative differs, for

example the NIC report is framed as a means to manage “challenges” (Feldbaum et al., 2011) associated with rising incarceration while food justice scholar and activist Joshua Sbicca describes the San Quentin project as a means to “oppose the carceral state,” (Sbicca, 2018) this chapter will also consider the ideologies and material practices of each of the four initiatives to further our understanding of how such programs are imagined and used across contexts. These four initiatives have two fundamental things in common: they all declare or argue, to some extent, that changes are necessary for U.S. incarceration (although with very different stances on its severity and root causes) and they all credit food and agriculture as the means to achieve their goals. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to contextualize Rikers-HSNY’s partnership among national, carceral agriculture education programs by first introducing a small sample of such programs and then tracing their unique goals, methods, and reasons by which food and agriculture are used to achieve those goals.

While this is by no means a comprehensive examination of all such programs in the country, and nor is it intended to suggest that such programs are even widely used, my goal is to develop a general picture of both differing and similar ways we represent, understand, and implement agriculture programs as forms of rehabilitation in jails and prisons for various intentions. The next (Chapter 4) and concluding (Chapter 5) chapters will read these findings through the work of carceral reform (particularly the work surrounding “carceral humanism”), the nature-valuation debate, and the specific history of farming and gardening initiatives at Rikers Island to consider some of the results and consequences of coupling nature (i.e. agriculture) with social justice via its perceived capacity to redeem and rehabilitate certain individuals over a longer historical period.

### **“Greening the identity of the facility”: the NIC report**

In March 2011, the National Institute of Corrections published their comprehensive report, *The Greening of Corrections: Creating a Sustainable System*, which served to provide the wider corrections field with “both a general understanding of sustainability practices and principles and by identifying examples of innovative and practical applications of operations, programs, and management



strategies for self-sustaining facilities” (National Institute of Corrections, 2019, p. iii). In the introduction, Director Morris L. Thigben describes the “challenges” associated with housing and maintaining the current number of people under U.S. correctional supervision (National Institute of Corrections, 2011). The range of costs associated with this degree of incarceration includes, according to Thigben, rising energy use, increased water and food, and the provision of education and training. The challenges may seem daunting, the Director notes, but ultimately the NIC believes “some of the most innovative and greatest cost savings solutions can be found in the greening of corrections” (National Institute of Corrections, 2011). This initiative is designed to confront the long-term impacts of corrections—including the buildings, operations, and programs—on the environment, community, and economy by reflecting the rise of “correctional professionals” that are turning to sustainability plans in order to sustain correctional facilities. We might consider these declarations to be literal, following Thigben’s assurance that sustainability measures can reduce costs, but also as a response to what Shanahan and Mooney describe as a “crisis of legitimacy” surrounding mass incarceration and the PIC. The following section discusses the role of NIC, the initiative’s general intentions/mission, and the programs it sees as model examples of carceral sustainability (and why).

The report is primarily a response to growing concern with the long-term impacts of [correctional] buildings, operations, and programs on the environment, community, and economy to which the report cites, “more and more leaders within corrections are evaluating” (Feldbaum et al., 2011). In order to “assist the corrections field in moving towards a more holistic and sustainable approach,” the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons National Institute of Corrections commissioned the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and its partners (as described in the report), RicciGreen Associates, John Jay College of Criminal Justice Prisoner Reentry Institute, The Corps Network, and Dr. Raquel Pinderhughes to collaboratively write this report as a general guide. The report cites three specific goals: the first of which is to “build or transform correctional agencies into self-sustaining, innovative facilities,” second, “identify green job

training programs and jobs that provide viable employment opportunities in the emerging green economy for individuals in correctional facilities and those reentering communities,” and finally, “make prison industry products, jobs, and services more environmentally friendly” (Feldbaum et al., 2011, p. iii). In order to touch on these goals, the report divides current research, strategies, and examples of prime strategies into five different categories. The first category is on the “greening of correctional facilities and their operations”; the second addresses “the education and training of inmates to prepare for reentry including environmental literacy”; the third shows the “current landscape of the greening of correctional industries through processes, products, and partnerships”; the fourth shows the “greening of reentry programs”; and finally, “recommendations and ‘how-to’ guides” (Feldbaum et al., 2011). The report’s cover image (Figure 1) reflects these stated goals and

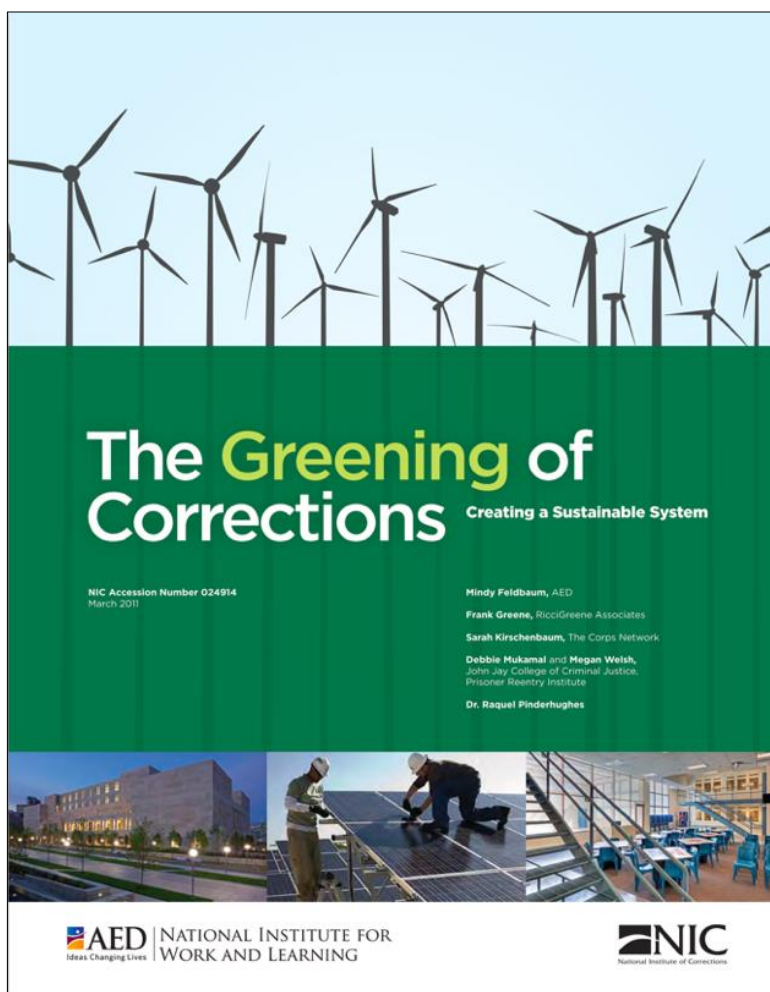


Figure 1. Cover of NIC report. Source: <https://nicic.gov/greening-corrections-creating-sustainable-system>

fundamental themes with green color blocking paired with photographs of windmills, solar panels, and a classroom.

To address the report's goals, the authors assert that correctional sustainability must address the "triple bottom line of '3 E's'": Environment, Economic, and Equity. The first two "E's" are rather straight forward, where "Environment" repeats the already stated intention of reducing negative environmental impact and "Economic" refers to reducing costs, as well as locating opportunities to actually generate revenue. The third "E" however, "Equity" addresses "targeting programs that will increase the possibility of redirecting or 'correcting' the behavior of the individuals whose activities have resulted in their incarceration" (Feldbaum et al., 2011, p. 1). This sentiment of correcting or rehabilitating individuals' sense of personal responsibility is a theme in the four cases but is most evident here and in the case of the programs through HSNY-Rikers. Two initiatives that serve as the report's prime examples of correctional sustainability programs are Rikers Island's GreenHouse and GreenTeam programs for "providing a pathway toward rehabilitation and reentry into society" and the Washington State Department of Corrections, "The Sustainable Prisons Project" (National Institute of Corrections, 2011). The following two sections will consider these two initiatives in more detail.

### **"The deep mystery of nature": HSNY-Rikers partnership**

Operated primarily by HSNY with partnership and assistance from the NYC Department of Correction (NYC DOC), the GreenHouse refers to both an educational and therapeutic program as well as a two-acre plot attached to the women's jail, while the GreenTeam is a "jail-to-street" program that provides temporary part-time work to GreenHouse graduates upon their release. As the GreenHouse and GreenTeam programs director from 1996 to 2008, Jiler recounts the historical origins, goals, strategies, and future outlook of the HSNY-Rikers relationship in a book written independently from HSNY. According to his account, the HSNY-Rikers partnership began in 1986 with funding from a city youth grant for a project that was developed to support adolescent men.

The initial program was ultimately terminated seven years later due to a funding cut by then-Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, leaving a vacant greenhouse behind (Jiler, 2006; Martin, 1999). Three years after the first program ended a new HSNY president, Anthony Smith, initiated a reinstatement which, with its significant reach beyond the adolescent individuals, was close to a new program altogether. As a former Assistant Deputy Commissioner of the Department of General Services for New York State, Smith made what Jiler referred to as a “well-placed call” to the current Commissioner of Correction at the time, Mike Jacobson, with a new proposal. The process of establishing a long-term partnership with Rikers in the form of horticultural therapy and education had begun, and by September 1997, the GreenHouse was officially formed (Martin, 1999).

Established at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, HSNY has long developed education and therapy programs for New Yorkers, including projects at and for public schools, low-income communities (usually in the form of “affordable workshops”), people incarcerated, and those previously convicted (The Horticultural Society of New York, 2019). The range of programs are illustrative of HSNY’s broader mission to “sustain the vital connection between people and plants” (The Horticultural Society of New York, 2019), demonstrating their firm belief in the connection between plants and gardens with human, wildlife, and environmental health (The Horticultural Society of New York, 2019). The closely linked GreenHouse and GreenTeam programs makeup two of HSNY’s five city-wide programs and are the only two focused on those either currently or previously incarcerated. The additional three programs, Apple Seed, Neighborhood Plaza Program, and NYdigs primarily emphasize and create either free or affordable gardens and public spaces around New York City. Apple Seed, for example, is an “in-school education program that builds learning gardens in public schools for thousands of disadvantaged children suffering from a lack of green spaces and fresh foods, and provides much-needed professional development to their teachers”; while Neighborhood Plaza Program, “beautifies public spaces in low-income communities across the five boroughs and helps make New York greener”; and NYdigs “provides affordable horticulture-based workshops, activities, and conferences to positively change perceptions and behaviors toward health, community,

and the environment” (The Horticultural Society of New York, 2019). Most of the programs are paired with training manuals and/or curriculum guides outlining the purpose(s) of the program as well as technical and logistical details and guidelines to ensure their success.

The comprehensive curriculum guide for the GreenHouse program titled, *Growing with the Garden: A Curriculum for Practicing Horticulture with Incarcerated Individuals*, opens with a poem from Walt Whitman:

To the garden, the world, anew ascending,  
Potent mates, daughters, sons, preluding,  
The love, the life of their bodies, meaning and being,  
Curious, here behold my resurrection, after slumber;  
The revolving cycles, in their wide sweep, have brought me again,  
Amorous, mature—all beautiful to me—all wondrous (Cannizzo, 2010).

Drawing on this certain sentiment toward the garden, the guide continues with an anecdote on the historically evident “healing quality of plants,” citing U.S. medical professionals’ documents from the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century recounting the number of patients who experienced faster recovery via exposure to “nature.” As a result, psychiatric hospitals began implementing “gardening as an in-house activity for patients, not only to grow food for institutional consumption, but also to promote healing in the mind and body” (Cannizzo, 2010, p. 1). For as the guide states, “it is now understood that gardening and plant care offer a host of rewards in increasing one’s self-esteem, developing job skills and creating avenues of nurturing and self-expression” (Cannizzo, 2010, p. 1). Referencing Psychiatrist Karl Menninger to insist these benefits are due to the “very power and deep mystery of nature” and lead to “individual growth and development” (Cannizzo, 2010, p. 1), we can already draw similarities between HSNY’s approach and that of the “rehabilitation” theory of incarceration from Gilmore outlined in Chapter 1. Yet, at this point in the guide there has been no mention of the subjects of rehabilitation, but merely the unique powers and capabilities of plants, which are made clear: “The serenity involved with designing and constructing a garden along with the work of maintaining it is instrumental in channeling anger and aggression into productive skills and activities” (Cannizzo, 2010, p. 1). The final note before introducing the specificities of the actual project at hand outlines a

“nation-wide movement to incorporate horticultural therapy into various medical facilities with the goal to promote positive and substantive changes in human behavior” (Cannizzo, 2010, p. 1).

At the risk of including the entirety of the GreenHouse curriculum guide’s introductory semantics on how best to implement horticultural therapy and education in jails and prisons, it is their framing of the *essential* role that plants play (i.e. “nature” or agriculture more specifically), coupled with the intensely *personal* failure that lead to one’s incarceration (i.e. the necessity of being redeemed of one’s failures and rehabilitated accordingly), that is of significant interest here, as it resembles the critiques of Allen, Guthman, and the nature-valuation debate. On the subject of those people who necessarily require “substantive changes in human behavior,” the guide finally introduces the participants for the GreenHouse project: people detained at Rikers Island. The guide’s primary author, John Cannizzo, notes that many of those incarcerated “have suffered frequent failures in the job place, low literacy and the frustrations of being marginalized in society” and horticulture provides the opportunity for them to “control their environment through shared responsibilities—an unspoken contract between person and plant” (Cannizzo, 2010, p. 1). Referencing some of the initiatives to incorporate plant-based therapy in places like “hospitals, drug abuse centers, psychiatric wards, and hospices,” jail and prison populations, on the other hand, “may encompass a whole range of personal disorders, physical ailments and anti-social behavior.” Horticultural therapy, then, is for HSNY *particularly* beneficial for those incarcerated; the reason being that while those incarcerated “may be incarcerated for crimes they committed, imprisonment does not address the underlying mental disorders that may have lead to criminal behavior in the first place” (Cannizzo, 2010, p. 2).

What perhaps makes this analysis of plants and incarcerated people startling is that it is followed with a list of statistics intended to reflect the societal inequalities and mistreatment that have weighed on the population most likely to find themselves passing through Rikers. The list does not include a citation, but makes the following references that closely resemble some of the statistics in the next chapter (Chapter 4): “two-thirds of the population is detainees,” “Male pop 90% of which black/Hispanic is 91%,” more than one-fourth cannot make bail of \$500,” and “ Highest charge is a

felony related to sale or possession” (Cannizzo, 2010, p. 2). The list also cites some disturbing numbers relating to rates of incarcerated people with HIV, mental illness, and psychiatric disorders. This anecdote affirms HSNY’s intention to provide a sense of support to, as Shanahan and Mooney described, the racially and class concentrated population Rikers. Yet, simultaneously that same population is described as ending up in jail *solely* for their own ill-advised choices, able to personally help break the cycle of mass incarceration. Here we can revisit Davis’ point in Chapter 1: “the contention that prisoners would refashion themselves if only given the opportunity to reflect and labor in solitude and silence disregarded the impact of authoritarian regime of living and work” (Davis, 2003). The people enrolled in the GreenHouse and GreenTeam programs may not be laboring in absolute solitude or silence, but we might sub in “gardening” to apply her point.

While neither the curriculum guide nor HSNY’s website confirms details of the enrollment process for its participants, Jiler describes all participants as paid volunteers, “earning the minimum 20-cents hourly wage as part of a work program” (Jiler, 2006, p. 31). Early on, the program consisted of fifteen women in the morning class followed by ten men in the afternoon, where “each group would work from four to six hours a day with instruction” (Jiler, 2006, p. 31). An HSNY staff member, however, confirmed that HSNY operates six distinct groups in three different facilities on Rikers Island; each group has a capacity of 12-15 participants at a time but “the exact census fluctuates” (EJ, 2019). The six groups are distinguished by the following: Sentenced Men; Sentenced Women; Mental Observation, Men; Mental Observation, Women; Young Adults, Women; Young Adults, Men. In order to be eligible for enrollment in one of the six groups, participants must be “screened and approved by DOC Staff,” as “ultimately it is the DOC who decides who is eligible for programming” (EJ, 2019). This decision is determined by each incarcerated person’s “security level” which is based on “behavior while incarcerated, number of infractions, and security and safety concerns” (EJ, 2019). This decision-making process is internal to the DOC, and the HSNY staff member was unable to provide any further details. However, they did confirm that “security level is not fixed, but is subject to change depending on interactions with fellow incarcerated persons,

officers, captains, and staff” (EJ, 2019).

The distinct “enrollment criteria” followed by HSNY differs slightly between each group. For the *Sentenced Men* group, participants must be: sentenced (convicted and serving sentence), 21+, have outside work clearance (which means the “person has permission by the DOC to go outside of the facility in which they are housed. Many individuals are not granted the ability to leave the facility”), and are assigned through “Inmate Assignment” meaning, “all sentenced adults who are deemed “able-bodied” are required to work while they are incarcerated. This class is designated a work detail by the DOC and participants either request it as a job or are assigned through ‘Inmate Assignment.’” The criteria for *Sentenced Women* is the same. For *Mental Observation, Men*, participants must also be: sentenced (convicted and serving sentence), housed in mental observation dorm, and are 21+. This program is voluntary that is “considered auxiliary to work details,” according to the HSNY staff member. “Participants are recruited by our staff and designated Program Officers who then verify security clearance for each candidate.” The fourth group, *Mental Observation, Women* participants must be: sentenced (convicted and serving sentence) or detained (not convicted, awaiting sentence), housed in mental observation dorm, and 21+. This is a voluntary auxiliary program like the previous group, but differs in that detainees can be enrolled. The fifth group, *Young Adults, Women* participants must be: either sentenced or detained and between the ages 18–21. This is also a voluntary auxiliary program like groups three and four. The final group, *Young Adults, Men* participant requirements are similar to group five: sentenced or detained, between the ages 18–21, however, this group is considered a “Program Dorm” which means that “all young adults in the designated ‘Horticulture’ dorm are required to attend programming in order to remain in the dorm. Participants receive a weekly stipend for their involvement. Upon intake into the facility, potential participants can request placement in the Horticulture dorm or they are assigned” (EJ, 2019).

The basic functions of the GreenHouse rest on the essential tasks it assigns to participants, including: construction, gardening, landscape maintenance, interior design, and floral arrangement and general management, while each set of tasks is designed to help participants find employment



when they re-enter their communities (Cannizzo, 2010, p. 3). As such, in addition to providing therapy and education on-site, one of the fundamental goals of the GreenHouse program is to connect those who were previously incarcerated with “various positions with greening organizations in the city,” ultimately leading to their second designated program, the “GreenTeam.” At the time that the curriculum guide was written, the GreenTeam component of HSNY’s programs at Rikers was developed in conjunction with the South Forty Corporation, a non-profit that, according to Cannizzo, “helps released inmates find positions of employment in the private and public sectors” (Cannizzo, 2010). Smith, the HSNY president at the time of the GreenHouse’s official creation was, according to Jiler, a board member of South Forty Corporation (who was also the former Assistant Deputy Commissioner of the Department of General Services). As the oldest job placement agency in New York State, the South Forty Corporation would not “provide ex-offenders with work immediately, but require them to go through a job readiness and preparedness program before they are sent out on interviews for prospective jobs” (Jiler, 2006, p. 142; NYC Service, 2019). The name, “South Forty,” refers to an American colloquialism that dates back to the Homestead Act of 1862, in which the south forty acres was that acreage that farmers, according to a 1972 New York Times article describing the corporation and its role at another prison in Beacon, NY, “got around to last-land that was a bit neglected but that might, with proper care, prove as productive as the rest of the spread” (Charlton, 1972). Linda Charlton, the article’s author, describes the non-profit’s name as a reference to a “rural allusion,” in which the “neglected potentials” is not farming acreage but rather a metaphor for people incarcerated. “For the last year,” Charlton wrote of the South Forty Corporation in 1972, “it has been trying to demonstrate that those neglected ‘acres’ of society can, with proper care, prove to be at least self-respecting and self-supporting” (Charlton, 1972).

In January 2001, the South Forty Corporation was absorbed by the Osborne Association, a non-profit founded by former mayor of Auburn, NY Thomas Mott Osborne who, according to the organization’s website, “spent a voluntary week in Auburn prison in 1913 as prisoner Tom Brown,” leading him to champion carceral reform as a warden of Sing Sing (NYC Service, 2019; The Osborne

Association, 2019). The Osborne Association did create a “South Forty Employment and Training Services” and despite the original agrarian vision conveyed through its name, the newly created division does not have any public ties to either today’s HSNY programs at Rikers or anything similar. Today, the Osborne Association’s mission champions alternatives to incarceration (without any explicit reference to nature or agriculture as a means of doing so). Yet, it is one of the seventeen sub-contractors selected by the architect for the current jail expansion plan, Perkins Eastman, to serve as “community engagement consultants.” The Osbourne Association has been described by the Wall Street Journal as a “criminal justice nonprofit” (Ramey, 2018; Wachs, 2018).

Today, the GreenTeam “provides short and long-term vocational training to youth at-risk, young adults, formerly incarcerated individuals, and homeless youth” on a year-round basis and is described by HSNY as the “Hort’s urban greening workforce,” that creates “environmentally sustainable and community-oriented” projects across “public plazas, supporting housing cooperatives, and parks” throughout New York City (“GreenTeam | The Horticultural Society of New York,” 2019). The GreenTeam program is designed to teach its participants “plant care, landscape design, and garden maintenance” in order to “transform neglected parts of the city” while learning “valuable life skills: responsibility, time management, and workplace professionalism” (“GreenTeam | The Horticultural Society of New York,” 2019). Even though applied differently, the language of “neglect” here bears close resemblance to the South Forty Corporation’s original mission: someone or someplace has been neglected and in the process of returning to it, we can extract a particular value that will teach its cultivators how to be better, more responsible citizens.

In its city-wide projects, the HSNY GreenTeam program coordinates with clients, from public servants such as city council members to individuals, to develop and install customized garden plans. For Jiler, the GreenTeam program is particularly substantial, offering a “disconcerting moment” when meeting those he previously worked with at Rikers on the streets of New York: “As we meet, there is a quiet hope in both of us that what took place at the Rikers greenhouse—the desire to change, cope and make a productive life—will now play out in a city park in mid-town Manhattan;

in a pent-house garden on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of a luxury building; or in any of the spaces we get paid to install and maintain gardens” (Jiler, 2006, p. 148). And thus, a noteworthy class intersection: if only those previously incarcerated (who, if they accurately reflect the general population at Rikers, are primarily men of color) learn to garden as a means to learn basic responsibility to which they did not have prior, they can then install gardens for Manhattan’s bourgeoisie.

Nonetheless, according to Jiler’s account, as of 2006 GreenTeam teams typically consisted of one supervisor and six full- and part-time interns. The “contract” between the supervisor and interns is, as Jiler describes, well-established: “1) use what was learned at the greenhouse; 2) be willing to learn and take orders; 3) come to work on time; 4) exhibit professional work manners on the job-site; and 5) stay clean, and we will do what we can to move you into a permanent job working with public or private agencies, organizations and businesses in the field of horticulture” (Jiler, 2006, p. 148). HSNY paid the interns a beginning wage of \$7.50 per hour with the potential to make up to \$10, “depending on the intern’s level of skill and responsibility they assume on the job site” (Jiler, 2006, p. 148). In short, the theme of learning and developing a sense of personal responsibility by gardening via condescending “contracts” cannot be overstated.

So thus, what—at face-value—is a project to support those who are more likely to have experienced such degrees of social marginalization, poverty, and abuse by providing some kind of educational and community-based therapy is also framed as a means to actually *fix* people and their ailments, because those ailments are why they must be incarcerated in the first place. Here we can begin to identify a contradiction internal to HSNY’s programs at Rikers between the discursive validation of personal-failure-leads-to-mass-incarceration—which in turn validates carceral expansion in the name of providing “therapeutic justice, education, and other treatment to its most needy citizens” (Schept, 2015, p. 6)—and its simultaneous project to provide a space of refuge for those who are most structurally marginalized. While each pole of this contradiction suggests remarkably different understandings of mass incarceration and intentions to support those incarcerated, the collective strategies rely on certain aspirations associated with cultivating human-nature relations.

That is, one end of this internal contradiction seems to identify the issue of mass incarceration as that of the failures of individuals, while also recognizing certain structural conditions that determine who it is that is incarcerated. Yet, the resolutions for each is still that of the garden.

Of course, this is not all that surprising coming from a *horticulture* society, but as we saw earlier in this section in the case of South Forty Corporation and we will see in the remaining three cases in this chapter as well wider social discourse in Chapter 4, the resolution put forth by HSNY resonates across vastly different realms. What's more, we can look back to the Physiocrats and Jefferson on their position of nature as inherently non-contradictory, or a non-dialectical, undifferentiated value-carrying whole (including both economic and social value) that can, therefore, make an *individual* whole who has been "broken" by or within society. This asserts a certain division between nature and society that places nature and our relationship to it in a way that it's perceived as something that cannot be understood, for instance HSNY's reference to the "deep mystery of nature—a force that in many circles is seen as a vehicle for individual growth and development" (Cannizzo, 2010). The HSNY programs at Rikers Island show us some of the ways in which these ideologies manifest to fetishize agriculture as "form" or "thing" and mystify, or even disregard, the associated social relations.

### **Washington State's "Sustainability in Prisons Project"**

The "Sustainability in Prisons Project" (SPP) was first initiated in 2002, when then-Governor Gary Locke "challenged all state agencies to meet new sustainability standards" in response to the "dual crises of ecological degradation and mass incarceration" ("Sustainability in Prisons Project," 2019). As a result, a partnership formed between The Evergreen State College and Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC). In addition to this partnership, SPP works with partners in the sciences and education programs in sustainability and environmentalism in all twelve of Washington's State prisons. While the program heralds sustainability initiatives that support infrastructural resource-efficiency and environmental conservation (such as its energy efficient lighting and

honeybee programs), “green-collar education and training” was the program’s first focus area and remains a top priority and feature of the program (Feldbaum et al., 2011).

As one of the program’s most prominent and distinct aspects, “green-collar education” is integrated into all of SPP’s “academic and vocational programs” as well as in “sustainability jobs such as composting, horticulture, aquaculture, and raising endangered species” (*Education as Rehabilitation*, 2019). With education and training holding a significant component in each program, the five programs are distinguished per the following titles: Ecological Conservation, Environmental Education, Sustainable Operations, Community Contributions, and Restorative Nature (“Sustainability in Prisons Project,” 2019).

The curriculum for each of these programs is extensive, but the Environmental Education and Restorative Nature programs provide the most insight into SPP’s ideology surrounding the use and benefits of nature in Washington’s state prisons. The Environmental Education program uses hands-on workshops and training as well as in-class instruction on a range of environmental subjects, including lectures on water use, horticulture, composting, and beekeeping (“Environmental Education | Sustainability in Prisons Project,” 2019). Each prison holds an environmental workshop each month, in which an estimated 3,000 incarcerated students have taken part in since 2009. Workshop participants “glean career and technical skills that can translate into career pathways in the growing green sector of the economy after release” (Feldbaum et al., 2011).

The Restorative Nature program “brings nature inside prisons with the motivation to relieve stress of prison environments” (“Restorative Nature | Sustainability in Prisons Project,” n.d.). Like HSNY, SPP references scientific literature and findings that show “when nature is available within institutional and urban environments, inhabitants may experience positive, therapeutic benefits” (“Restorative Nature | Sustainability in Prisons Project,” n.d.). These programs generally refer to the use of flower gardens, house plants, heritage gardens, and “nature imagery” throughout the prisons (“Restorative Nature | Sustainability in Prisons Project,” n.d.).

According to SPP’s website, the program is funded by an “array of contracts and grants,

generally from 8–12 sources sat any one time” (“Funding | Sustainability in Prisons Project,” 2019).

Evergreen State College does not provide direct funding for the programs but makes other contributions such as: providing space, payroll, access to students and faculty, human resource services, grant, foundation, and budget support.

### **Insight Garden Program: agriculture as a means to “oppose the carceral state”**

My fourth and final example of a carceral agriculture education program is the product of a partnership between the San Quentin State Prison and the Oakland-based food justice organization, Planting Justice. In this section, I rely on both the Insight Garden Program’s (IGP) published materials as well as descriptions and personal associations of sociologist and food justice scholar-activist Joshua Sbicca (Sbicca, 2018). I will then trace some of Sbicca’s theoretical frameworks that inform his own analysis of IGP and the role that it plays in “opposing the carceral state” (Sbicca, 2018). But first, a note on food justice, as it forms the foundation of this program.

With IGP’s partnership with the food justice organization Planting Justice, food justice serves as a foundation to both IGP and Sbicca’s analysis of it. The food justice movement grew largely out of opposition to the alternative agriculture movement (introduced in Chapter 1) and confronts pleas like “Vote with your fork”<sup>8</sup> to instead link food and agriculture to “ecological sustainability, community, and health but also to racial, economic, and environmental justice” (Alkon, Alison Hope; Agyeman, 2011, p. 4). Taking up the food justice movement’s call to center social relations in analyses of the broader food system, Sbicca identifies both a theoretical and practice-based paradigm shift from the generalized food movement (closely related to the traditional sustainability movements discussed in Chapter 1) to a food *justice* movement and elucidates the developments that demarcate food justice from its predecessor: a foregrounding of structural inequalities based on the intersections of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Sbicca effectively contextualizes this (fairly recent) historical evolution while presenting some necessary next steps for food justice scholars and activists, most namely of which is a call to organize with social movements

---

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/voting-with-your-fork/>

outside sustainability and agriculture. In pursuit of this task, Sbicca holds firm in his argument that “food justice is the sine qua non that connects activists across a range of interests and stretches the frontiers of food politics precisely because of the resonance of food justice in broader social struggle” (Sbicca, 2018, p. 1). As such, in discussing the IGP, Sbicca is most interested in taking insights from the food justice movement to understand the methods by which food can confront the carceral state on a wider scale.

While IGP has collaborated with Planting Justice since April 2009, the project was originally founded in 2002, first as a volunteer organization and then fiscally sponsored through the Agape Foundation, and later the Peace Development Fund. By 2014, IGP received its first 501(c)3 non-profit status, with expansion plans to other California state prisons underway. The core mission and goals of IGP are made clear on the homepage of their website with a large title that spans across the top of the page: “Insight Garden Program transforms prisoners’ lives through connection to nature” (“Insight Garden Program – Connection through nature,” 2019; Planting Justice, 2019). The page continues to describe the program’s facilitation of “innovative curriculum combined with vocational gardening and landscaping training so that people in prison can reconnect to self, community, and the natural world” (“Insight Garden Program – Connection through nature,” 2019). This approach to gardening “transforms lives, ends ongoing cycles of incarceration, and creates safer communities” (“Insight Garden Program – Connection through nature,” 2019). The purpose of this work, however, is in response to the state of the PIC: “With the United States spending more than \$80 billion/year nationally on the prison-industrial complex, we can’t afford *not to do this work*” (“Insight Garden Program – Connection through nature,” 2019, emphasis in original). Similar to Rikers-HSNY, IGP cites the lack of support available to people incarcerated, both in-prison and post-release, and attempts to fill this gap through their “restorative approach through connection to nature” (“Insight Garden Program – Connection through nature,” 2019).

The logistical aspects of IGP also hold a certain resemblance to HSNY’s programs, with a garden located in the prison’s medium-security division, housing prisoners convicted of “lower-level

crimes such as assault, burglary, and drug-possession (Sbicca, 2018, p. 49).” The prison-based horticultural therapy program is designed “to help prisoners draw connections between nurturing plants, cooperation, and healing from the trauma of incarceration” (Sbicca, 2018, p. 50). IGP’s literature weighs more heavily on addressing trauma experienced *during* incarceration than the HSNY curriculum guide (which emphasizes that people incarcerated are more likely to have trauma disorders when they arrive), yet still bears resemblance to much of Jiler’s descriptions.

The garden at San Quentin is one of the only non-segregated spaces in the prison, while therapeutic sessions encourage folks to “collectively share their life experiences, struggles, and hopes for reentering their communities” (Sbicca, 2018, p. 49). At the time of publication, Planting Justice had hired eighteen men to build gardens in the city of San Francisco; none of which had returned to prison.

#### **Four carceral sustainability programs: drawing comparisons**

As we have seen so far in this chapter, each of the four sustainability/agriculture education programs examined in varying detail above are developed and maintained by distinctly different types of organizations with varying stated intentions. The NIC report declares the fundamental goal of providing an informational tool for corrections facilities to utilize sustainability practices and education to reduce environmental impact, reduce costs, and generate revenue in the face of increasing challenges associated with the high volume of people in U.S. jails and prisons. The HSNY-Rikers programs, on the other hand, are primarily described as providing opportunities for education and therapy to people incarcerated, to both improve the time they spend there and reduce their risk of returning. SPP in Washington, similar to the NIC report, originated as a response to alleviate the “dual crises in ecological degradation and mass incarceration” and champions various forms of environmental education as a means to manage such crises. And finally, the IGP at San Quentin State Prison’s central values are similar, in a lot of ways, to HSNY-Rikers with the goal to “transform prisoners’ lives through connection to nature” and address prisoners’ traumas experienced either



before or during their incarceration.

While there are clear distinctions between the programs, there are also significant aspects that strike remarkable similarity to one another, both in ideology and practice (or in the case of the NIC report, their descriptions of ideal practices). For example, each of the four programs identifies and connects two central problems that are in need of addressing or managing: mass incarceration is not environmentally friendly and could do significantly more to honor its origins as a premier method of rehabilitation for the citizens who, presumably, need it most. The response to these identified problems is to bridge their presumed connection to one another. That is, each of the four programs seeks to manage environmental degradation, reduce levels of mass incarceration, and integrate rehabilitation in corrections by asserting the ways in which sustainability initiatives can (and do) reduce both the toxicity and sheer volume of people imprisoned. For example: the NIC describes the ways in which a “holistic and sustainable system can be achieved” by incorporating practices based on “green principles and practices” (Feldbaum et al., 2011, p. iii); Jiler observes the ways that the garden at Rikers offers a meditative experience, “an avenue of self-expression, and through the accumulation of knowledge—empowerment” (Jiler, 2006, p. 49) that, to his hope, will “break the cycle of recidivism” (Jiler, 2006, p. 17); Washington’s SPP states the primary goal to “reduce recidivism while improving human well-being and ecosystem health” in response to the “dual crises of ecological degradation and mass incarceration” (“Sustainability in Prisons Project,” 2019); and finally, IGP uses “vocational gardening and landscaping training so that people in prison can reconnect to self, community, and the natural world” that in turns “transforms lives, ends ongoing cycles of incarceration, and creates safer communities” (“Insight Garden Program – Connection through nature,” 2019). Each of the four initiatives cites sustainability as the answer to the problems imposed of mass incarceration, regardless of whether their intention is to sustain or intervene in the carceral state.

Looking more closely at some of the ways in which these initiatives’ intentions contradict one another yet share the same or very similar course of action, we can consider NIC and IGP in

particular. While the NIC report presumes some sort of automatic, ongoing rise in mass incarceration, IGP aims to challenge current correctional practices in the U.S. Yet, their ways of achieving their goals are remarkably similar with their reliance on carceral agriculture education programs (or as the NIC refers to it, “green-collar training”). In addition, both IGP and the NIC report cite HSNY as their collaborator and prime example, respectively, for their own (distinctly different) projects. IGP lists HSNY programs at Rikers Island as one of their eleven collaborators that also utilize sustainability in prisons to “support and empower the collective restoration of people and communities” (“Insight Garden Program – Connection through nature,” 2019) and the NIC references Rikers several times throughout their report and highlights the work at Rikers in a one-page feature, stressing the programs’ reported effects on recidivism. If Sbicca claims that programs like that of IGP can “oppose the carceral state,” yet both IGP and the NIC report (that wants to further sustain increasing levels of incarceration) cite the same program (HSNY) as collaborator and example in doing this work, how could their outcomes be as different as they are intended to be? This is a question that I begin to address in the remainder of this Chapter and revisit more directly in the Conclusion.

Despite their distinct, sometimes contradicting intentions, the four programs’ methods all foreground the *individual* in transforming the carceral state. For example, the theme evident across the programs is that if individuals garden, they, in turn, learn the *value* embedded in the garden, and thus can then change their own conditions *and* that of the carceral state for the better. Foregrounding the agricultural activity of the individual to transform both the individual and the wider institution not only romanticizes the potentials of agriculture but also attributes systemic change to a series of isolated practices.

The theme of individualism is more expected, and apparent, in some programs versus others. That is, attributing widescale imprisonment and recidivism to individuals in such a degree that gardening could be (and as the four programs argue, is) the nationwide answer to improving the disasters of the carceral state is not surprising from the NIC report, rather it’s quite expected given

their introductory statements; but those deeply invested in HSNY and IGP, Jiler and Sbicca, also come to this conclusion regarding the potentials of sustainability initiatives to intervene in the cycles of policing and caging, even while they directly refer to the racist, classist, and gendered forces fueling the criminal justice system. For example, Jiler tells a disturbing story of one participant who was one of his more dedicated students, who had been in jail only once, had a secure job as a medical technician, and a home to return to when she was released; but nonetheless, ended up back in jail because her boyfriend called the police claiming she stole something after an argument. Jiler writes of his shock, asking how they could possibly arrest her if she is innocent, especially considering the police didn't even find the item that was claimed stolen. But another one of his students explains to him, "Doesn't matter, any contact with police is a violation. By the time they hear your case you're already doing time" (Jiler, 2006, p. 47). Jiler can't even reincorporate her back into the program—she's headed to a prison upstate for upwards of a year. However, from this discussion, Jiler seamlessly transitions into the challenges of working in these programs in the jail setting as opposed to the prison, with more short-term students. Nevermind the glaring example of the ways gardening and individual therapy, no matter how effective, does not correct the system.

Sbicca, on the other hand, recognizes these functions of policing and caging in a way that Jiler fails to, yet still ultimately places his focus on work at the *individual* level. Sbicca's position on the potential of food and agriculture programs to oppose the carceral state is meticulous and extensive, and a brief overview will deepen analysis of whether—and how—carceral agriculture education programs can meet their claims to both sustain and oppose the carceral state. By crediting the "deepening connection between food and carceral politics" and the ways "food politics have absorbed the carceral conjuncture" Sbicca reflects on centuries of the intersections between food insecurity and inequality with carceral politics (Sbicca, 2018, p. 51), noting with careful attention the severity of probation and parole that attributes to what Rashad Shabazz calls the "prison-like environment" that Jiler overlooked (Shabazz cited in Sbicca, 2018). Citing the ways the system of mass incarceration targets "the same working-class communities and communities of color

disproportionately experiencing food inequities and other traumas” (Sbicca, 2018, p. 52) Sbicca positions the work of IGP in intervening primarily in reentry, while showing how food justice is expanded with the work of prison reform and abolition, restorative justice, permaculture, and economic justice (Sbicca, 2018, p. 19). Drawing on the work of restorative justice (RJ), which focuses on the “needs of victims, reintegrates offenders, and works with the local community to rehabilitates victims and offenders,” Sbicca cites the merge of restorative justice with “greening justice” initiatives as formerly incarcerated people around the world “nurture a connection to nature through food and gardening, develop green jobs skills and certifications, and facilitate ties to local social movements” (Sbicca, 2018, p. 67). These initiatives, Sbicca argues, allow people to “experience greater levels of contentedness, space for reflection, deeper levels of communication with others, and an opportunity to practice caring through communion with nature” (Sbicca, 2018, p. 67). Despite that Sbicca’s articulation of RJ is very much rooted in social bonds, it still prioritizes nurturing individual connections to nature as a means to reduce recidivism and transform the PIC and mass incarceration. While an adequate study of the ways the theoretical and practical works of food justice and restorative justice can inform one another would be another paper entirely, at this point I am particularly interested in Sbicca’s articulation of the bridge between the two, and what it provides in terms of conceptualizing the work of carceral agriculture education programs. In terms of limitations following Sbicca’s articulation, we can look at Jiler’s example (and unfortunately many like it) to affirm that intervention based solely on breaking (individual) recidivism has its limits. In the concluding chapter of this thesis (Chapter 5) I briefly return to an analysis of RJ, as well as the lesser-known transformative justice (TJ) in consideration of potential future research.

On the topic of potential limitations of organizing around food and agriculture (as framed in response to one of the organizers Sbicca works with throughout his book project), Sbicca affirms: “Debating the perimeters of the food justice movement matters less than strategizing how to direct this energy to spread the practice of a food politics that intervenes in structural inequalities.” But Sbicca’s refusal to develop a comprehensive understanding of the project’s limitations not only

severely affects the ability to strategize for its success but can also encourage a misguided, essentialist understanding of food and agriculture. Ultimately, doesn't this very refusal constitute a foundational critique of the alternative food movement (in its disregard for social forces and relations) that the food justice movement aims to address? Sbicca's analysis of food justice and IGP convincingly argues that food justice, when practiced in ways like that of IGP, effectively consider the forces of racial capitalism—but it still fails to decouple the “form” or “thing” of agriculture itself from the social processes and relations that it is based on. While Sbicca notes the prevalence of these concerns by spectators, he does not offer further discussion on the topic. What's more, and somewhat contradictory, Sbicca does cite an important and particular challenge for food justice strategizing in that food “faces co-optation and dilution in unique ways that require perseverance” and “food can be fetishized to mask underlying social relations” (Sbicca, 2018, p. 168). In addition, and in specific reference to racial neoliberalism, Sbicca affirms that the food movement can easily be a mechanism to serve elitist individualism in the name of “local food, family farms, and organic, where each represents inherent immutable qualities in their commodified form” (Sbicca, 2018, p. 168). Nonetheless, he maintains that we “spread the practice of food politics that intervenes in structural inequalities,” even while stating that it very well may sustain those inequalities rather than intervene due to our habits of fetishizing food and agriculture.

The consequences of fetishizing nature, as Lefebvre tells us (explored in Chapter 2 of this thesis), is that it reduces nature to “a confirmation of the undefined and indefinable multiplicity of things” that ultimately “gets lost in classifications, descriptions, and segmentations” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81). These abstracted, lost “indefinable multiplicity of things” exist in our imaginaries as void of the processes (i.e. social relations) of which they are constituted. For example, if the abstract multiplicity of things is the jail or prison garden, to fetishize it is to see it distinct from the social relations of which it is constituted. But as the examples of the Physiocrats, Jefferson, and the “new agrarianism” as pegged by Guthman demonstrate, prevailing ideologies of nature and especially agriculture are just that: abstractions void of social relations. Thus, considering both Sbicca's remarks

on the unique ways that food can be obscured and the historical contexts of agrarianism, I suggest that we should be particularly insistent in deconstructing the abstractions associated with food and agriculture. As the discussions in Chapter 2 demonstrate, to follow in the footsteps of agrarianism is to assume that agriculture is that which, as Jefferson claimed, “will contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness.” Following this logic, we assume that we can simply insert agriculture into any given circumstance, however adverse, and produce real wealth, good morals, and happiness. Guthman’s narrative of organic farming practices in California is just one finite demonstration of why this is not only false, but why we must be careful to identify and contest these ideologies.

In the following chapter, I examine the ways in which food is, as Sbicca so succinctly puts it, “fetishized to mask underlying social relations,” while also considering the limitations and perimeters of the carceral agriculture education programs by tracing narratives of Rikers Island from its origins as New York City’s progressive new jail, to various farming projects throughout its history, to its current state as an acclaimed humanitarian crisis, with jail garden firmly intact.

#### **(4) A New Agrarianism or Methods of Reform?: Identifying a Historical Pattern of Contradictions Between Carceral Farming's Claims and Carceral Humanitarian Crises**

In this chapter, I trace a longer history of agriculture at Rikers Island through popular portrayals and representations, in both historical and contemporary media milieu, in pursuit of a deeper understanding of how social imaginaries of agriculture in carceral settings conceal carceral logics and justify continued expansion. My fundamental question in beginning and developing this research was the following: are the sentiments publicized by those institutions directly involved in organizing and promoting carceral agriculture programs (i.e. HSNY and the NIC report) echoed in popular media? Do popular narratives adapt the portrait and represent agriculture programs at Rikers Island as inherently rehabilitating (and even redeeming) for its participants or the institution(s) more broadly? In short, it is clear that the agrarian ideologies promoted by the programs also prevail across popular narratives. As such, a substantial portion of the popular narratives represented, similar to HSNY, emphasize the tremendously positive benefits of agriculture for not only individual wellbeing but also in addressing mass incarceration.

While examining the popular portrayals of farming at Rikers, what became significant was the backdrop of Rikers Island itself, from its origin as NYC's "new modern penitentiary" ("Asks a City Prison on Rikers Island," 1925) to its current state of humanitarian crisis. Thus, in addition to examining popular portrayals of farming at Rikers Island, I also consider the contradictions that exist between the claims of farming and the jail's material conditions of incarceration. While the narratives of agriculture at Rikers Island are primary, Rikers' origin as New York City's "new modern penitentiary" situates the farming project in the literature and debates of carceral reform more broadly i.e. Schept's "progressive punishment" and Kilgore's "carceral humanism." From this examination, carceral agriculture education programs are praised for their inherent capacities to rehabilitate prisoners and presumably establish institutional legitimacy, but they do not, by default, meet these claims.

In consideration of present crises of legitimacy surrounding the PIC and Rikers Island more

specifically, I follow Shanahan and Mooney's use of Foucault's suggestion to conduct a "history of the present," to pursue history "not in the service of some imagined God's eye objectivity, but as it draws from present political problems to elucidate the political exigencies of present struggles" (Shanahan & Mooney, 2018). In constructing a "history of the present" I ask: what significance can the contradiction between agriculture-based redemption and dehumanizing conditions bring to modern struggles? As the GreenHouse and GreenTeam programs persist, campaigns promise to ensure Rikers' upcoming closure—only to be replaced by a series of four borough-based jails that would, much like the original Rikers, be built on "a foundation of dignity and respect" and "serve as a catalyst for positive change" (City of New York, 2019b). As Shanahan and Mooney demonstrate so clearly, we are in the historical pattern of replacing crumbling jails with more "progressive," shinier versions that are not alternatives, but mere repetitions of the same.

The chapter begins with a background of Rikers Island jail complex from its establishment in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century to today (tracing its history from the "new modern penitentiary" to its current state). From there, I look at the history of farming at Rikers, focusing on media narratives and representations that predate the HSNY programs (which were established until 1997). I then compare the archival media to more contemporary stories, hoping to determine whether any significant discursive transformations occur.

### **Reform and crisis: a condensed history of Rikers Island**

In March 1925, the Grand Jurors Association of New York declared the penitentiaries on Blackwell's Island, or what's currently known as Roosevelt Island "antiquated and unfit," while then-Mayor Jimmy Walker declared they were in need of immediate closure ("Asks a City Prison on Rikers Island," 1925). The "new modern penitentiary and industrial buildings" that were to replace them would be built (by the penitentiary's own prisoners) on a new island: Rikers. A fundamental goal of the new jail site was to continuously provide work for the people it housed, who were "kept from performing useful labor by the present inadequate buildings" at Welfare Island ("Asks a City Prison



on Rikers Island,” 1925).

The planned relocation site for the city’s jails on Rikers Island however posed some doubts in the form of, as the New York Times put it in 1926, “engineering problems connected with building a great new prison on Riker’s Island, much of which has been filled in by the dumping of city refuse” (“Island Playground Favored By Walker,” 1926). At this point Rikers Island had long been a site of regular farming, a work camp for prisoners at Blackwell’s Island, and the location of the city’s landfill. In the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century prisoners were transported to what was then about a 65-acre island also referred to as “The Municipal Farm” where they would sort through garbage by hand (Shanahan & Mooney, 2018)

By October 1930, Commissioner Richard C. Patterson outlined the NYC DOC’s upcoming correctional plans to replace Welfare Island to delegates of thirty-five “adult protection agencies” of the Welfare Council at the council’s office in Manhattan’s Flatiron neighborhood. (“Maps Prison Plans Here: Patterson Explains Riker’s Island Program to Social Workers,” 1930). A New York Times article quotes the chairman, Dr. Helen Montague: “With the letting of bids for the \$9,500,000 prison on Riker’s Island to replace the penitentiary on Welfare Island, which is about 100 years old, our program for an improved penal system is well under way” (“Maps Prison Plans Here: Patterson Explains Riker’s Island Program to Social Workers,” 1930).

Today, Rikers Island is a 413-acre island in the East River (which grew by hundreds of acres due to the landfill activity), serving as the principal jail complex for New York City with eight of the city’s eleven jail facilities (City Planning Commission, 2019; New York City Department of Correction, 2019). And while it may have been originally marketed as the city’s most progressive jail, Rikers is widely considered to be one of the country’s most notoriously violent.<sup>9</sup> As of June 2017, Rikers reported an average daily population of 8,195 people (City of New York, 2019a; New York

---

<sup>9</sup> For example, see: Aviva Stahl, “New York City Jails Still Can’t Keep Trans Prisoners Safe” (2017) in *The Village Voice*; John Surico, “How Rikers Island Became the Most Notorious Jail in America” (2016) in *Vice*; and Heather Alexander, “New York’s notorious Rikers Island prison ‘to close’ after years of complaints” (2017) in *The Telegraph*.

City Department of Correction, 2019), consisting of pre-trial detainees, city-sentenced inmates, and state-sentenced inmates (Lowenstein, 2017) with a significant majority (roughly 76 percent in 2017) being detainees (*NYC Department of Correction at a Glance*, 2017). In 2016, the city's Independent Budget Office determined that 60 percent of NYC's average daily jail population is held—without conviction—because they are too poor to post bail (Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reforms, 2016). Nine out of ten people in NYC jails are either Black (55 percent) or Latinx (34 percent) (New York City Department of Corrections, 2019) and as Shanahan and Mooney state, Rikers' facilities “hold one of the most racially and class concentrated inmate populations in the country, with 96 percent hailing from African American and Latino families and 56 percent never having graduated from high school” (Shanahan & Mooney, 2018). Following recent years of infamous violence, high-profile tragedies, and pressure from activists and local communities, an appointed independent commission and NYC's Mayor Bill de Blasio have officially recommended and declared its pending closure (de Blasio, 2017; Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reforms, 2016). While the plans to close the jails on Rikers Island are met with significant support from local communities and activist- and non-profit- organized campaigns, there are distinctly different positions between them. As Shanahan and Mooney succinctly summarize, “the well-funded political movement backed by the Ford Foundation and prominent New York City politicians under the banner #Close Rikers is meeting the crisis of legitimacy around Rikers Island” with a plan to close Rikers but replace it with the four new jails (the plans and marketing of which strike striking similarity to Rikers' own opening). The #CLOSErikers campaign is met with direct opposition by #NoNewJails which shares the goal of closing Rikers but opposes the plans to build new jails in its place. Following Rikers Island's notorious reputation, the current contestations surrounding its closure are significant for prison reform and abolition both now and in the future (Shanahan & Mooney, 2018).

It is also important to stress that the reality of violent mistreatment at Rikers is not a recent development. As Shanahan and Mooney meticulously demonstrate, while Rikers was “based on the

most progressive principles of prison reform,” it was (like the penitentiary on Welfare Island that preceded it) “constructed using the forced labor of some of the city’s poorest men, including a high density of immigrant and black workers” (Shanahan & Mooney, 2018). The following section of this chapter charts the history of farming at Rikers and even more specifically, how representations of that farming erase the history and conditions for prisoners on Rikers Island.

### **“The island is now a big vegetable garden”**

The first recorded farming activity on Rikers Island reaches back to the 1600s (New York Correction History Society, 2018). And while ownership and use of the island was consistently transferred between private owners and the military (according to the NYC DOC, the island was used as camp for Union troops during the Civil War), NYC ultimately purchased Rikers Island in 1884 “for use by the Department of Public Charities and Correction” (New York Correction History Society, 2018). The purchase was made during the mayoral-administration of Franklin Edson, “who in his youth had worked on a farm during summer months” (New York Correction History Society, 2018). An NYC DOC article that charts the history of farming on Rikers Island notes that despite the mayor’s background in agriculture, it was not simply nostalgia nor admiration that prompted the purchase. Rather, the island (which at that time, was approximately 90 acres compared to the 400+ it is today) became the “city’s Municipal Farm aka prison farm colony” (New York Correction History Society, 2018).

Nine years after the city’s purchase (which puts us at the year 1893), Rikers Island was turned into a landfill for Manhattan’s garbage, trash, and debris (New York Correction History Society, 2018). In 1895, there were reports of vegetable crops growing “without the consent of the Commissioners of Charities and Correction, under whose jurisdiction the island is supposed to be” (“The Riker’s Island Farm,” 1895). The crops were reportedly grown from seeds spread to the island from the city’s hotel garbage, alongside pools of “dark water through which gas came up in little bubbles” (“The Riker’s Island Farm,” 1895). Although the island was investigated due to reports of

foul odors wafting onto the mainland, Sanitary Inspector Frederick Springer focused on another finding: vegetables. In his report to Board of Health President Charles G. Wilson, Springer explained that he did not find anything emitting any odors. Instead, he explained, “the island is now a big vegetable garden. The seeds in the garbage have taken root in the earth, spread over the island, and this is the result.” As the article continues, Wilson was understandably confused but responded, “It must be a fine place” (“Riker’s Island a Garden,” 1895). And thus, despite the pools of water and gaseous bubbles (and the fact that the President investigated the island following reports of foul odors coming from the island) Rikers Island was deemed to be in “satisfactory condition” (“The Riker’s Island Farm,” 1895).

Almost 30 years later, a 1922 annual report (over a decade prior to the opening of the penitentiary complex) by then-Correction Commissioner James A. Hamilton, listed Rikers Island as “Municipal Farm, Rikers Island” in the Directory of DOC bureaus and institutions. Food and forage production tables list yields for both vegetables (up to 18 types) and pork (New York Correction History Society, 2018). The DOC annual report states (according to the NYC DOC article):

From the Municipal Farm, Rikers Island, the quality and quantity [of vegetables] produced were better and greater than ever. Soil conditions have been greatly improved by delivery of manure from the Department of Street Cleaning . . . The pork received from hogs raised at Riker’s Island and New Hampton Farm was of good quality” (New York Correction History Society, 2018).

In addition to describing farming practices at Rikers Island, the NYC DOC article also makes a point of noting that food and forage production tables list farming yields for five other NYC DOC locations in addition to Rikers. The Municipal Farm on Rikers Island served as a hospital for males with drug addiction, hailed as “perfect” with the surrounding farm providing the “best” environment for treatment of drug addiction (New York Correction History Society, 2018).

However, the NYC DOC article subsequently mocks the notions that the Rikers Island farms could (or did) cure drug addicts, stating directly: “Today the mind boggles at the notion that anyone in authority would dare claim, much less believe, addicts were getting ‘fresh air’ benefits from placement on the island municipal farm near the continuous dumping of garbage, trash, debris, and excavated materials. Yet there is little evidence that the authorities actually doubted what they

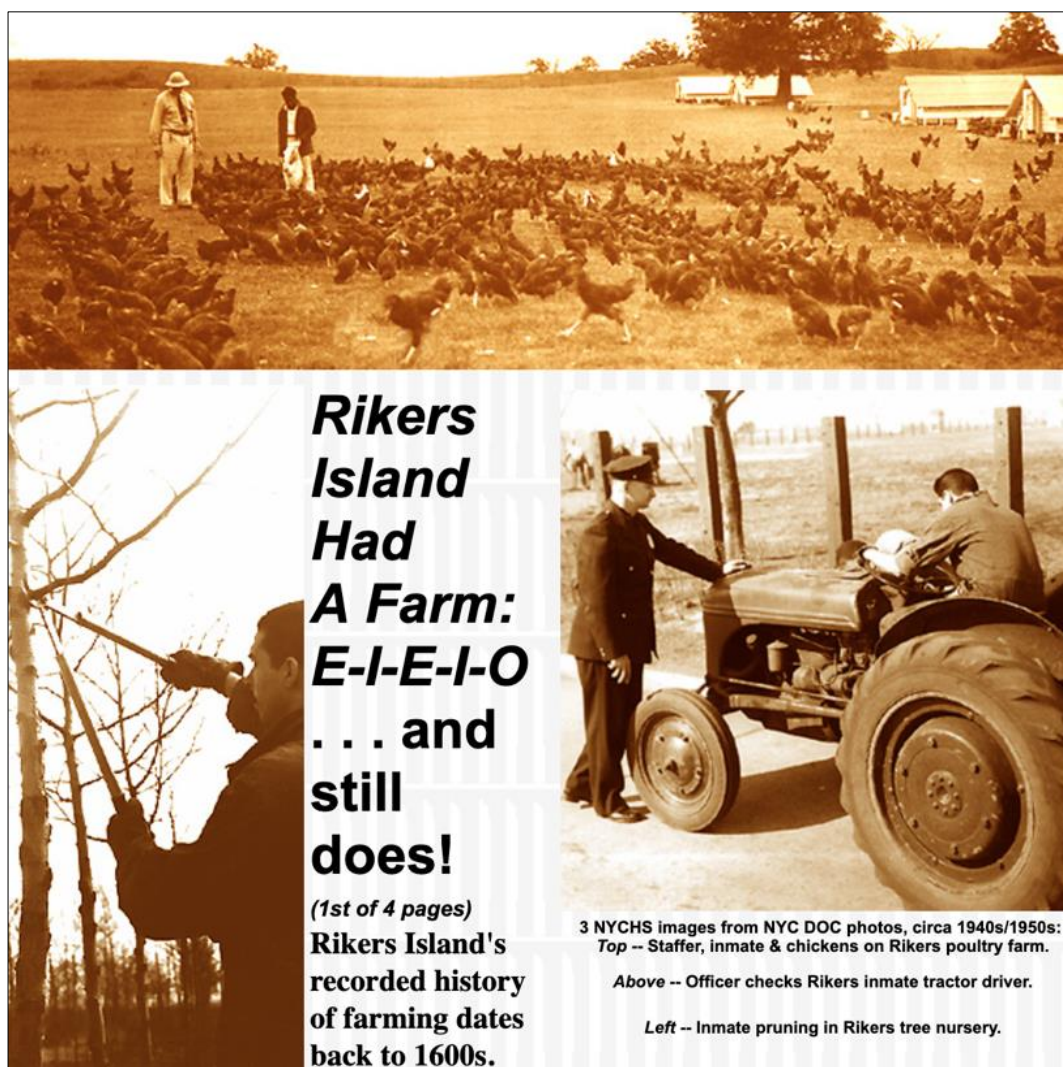


Figure 2. Title and introductory images from the NYC DOC official archival website charting the history of farming on Rikers Island. Source: <http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/rikersfarm/rikersfarm1.html>

proclaimed back then” (New York Correction History Society, 2018). This response is especially interesting considering the purpose of this article, titled ““Rikers Island Had A Farm: E-I-E-I-O . . . and still does!” (Figure 2), is to compare Rikers Island’s historical farming practices to that of today. Nevertheless, the article states that 1920s-era medical professionals signed off on the apparent health

benefits of farming on Rikers Island (i.e. a landfill) had less knowledge of “what constitutes healthful environments” (New York Correction History Society, 2018).

When the penitentiary was eventually established in 1935, Rikers Island lost its designation as “Municipal Farm,” but farming practices continued. The NYC DOC article references a report by Correction Commissioner Peter F. Amoroso in 1941 stating: “A 100-acre farm, operated by 50 inmates under supervision of skilled farm instructor raises a variety of vegetables. A piggery, with 700 swine, produces 110,000 pounds of pork annually. A greenhouse is now in use” (Amoroso quoted in New York Correction History Society, 2018). The greenhouse examined in Chapter 2, thus, reflects decades of farming practices at Rikers Island jails.

Continuing the tradition of farming on the island, a tree nursery was established in 1940 to supply trees for City parks, maintained by the labor of those incarcerated in the penitentiary. The project was reportedly suggested to the Department of Correction by then-Commissioner of Parks, Robert Moses. The work of turning 25 acres of a literal garbage dump into a tree farm with “rich soil and 13,477 saplings” was done by the labor of 200 prisoners from Rikers Island Penitentiary and the Parks Department Director of Horticulture, David Schweizer (“City Turns Dump Into Tree Nursery,” 1941; Farrell, 1953). The nursery project, according to the New York Times, not only transformed a “huge dump in the upper East River into a garden but also provided the penitentiary inmates useful and healthful work and given the city a source of supply of park trees at low cost” (“City Turns Dump Into Tree Nursery,” 1941). What’s more, the Parks Department no longer had to buy what it needed from commercial nurseries, but now had a private farm (use of the farm was not permitted by anyone other city agencies) (Farrell, 1953). By 1953, journalist William M. Farrell for the New York Times described Rikers Island as a “Rustic ‘Paradise’” in reference to the tree farm (Figure 3). He writes: “Few professed nature lovers have ever set foot in it, but deep in the heart of New York there is a broad area where mourning doves gather in the spring, where pheasants roam undisturbed, where azaleas bloom and graceful golden willows stand in neat rows” (Farrell, 1953). Short-term prisoners “dig in the earth, which is a mixture of ashes, broken glass, junked metals and

old garbage” (Farrell, 1953). Farrell continues: “Not the least of the nursery’s benefits have been those gained by the prisoners who labor in it, according to Warden Dros.” The range of offenders and benefits from working on the farm are significant, as he explains that “Alcoholics, getting back to nature, gain strength and weight. Youthful offenders are often astonished at finding satisfaction in



Figure 3. The tree farm at Rikers Island. Source: Farrell, W (1941). “Rustic ‘Paradise’ On Rikers Island.” The New York Times.

helping to grow hawthorns, plane trees, lilacs, Japanese holly and other things. Bookmakers make fine garden workers, and so do violators of traffic laws” (Farrell, 1953). Only one plant is prohibited, “That is marijuana, source of the drug to which some of the Workhouse inmates owe their presence there” (Farrell, 1953). We can certainly, and very easily, compare Farrell’s commentary to any of the four programs analyzed in Chapter 3, as well as the perceived benefits gleaned from nature discussed throughout this thesis, but especially in Chapter 2.

In 1999 (about two years after the GreenHouse was established), journalist Douglas Martin wrote in awe of the recycling and horticulture programs on Rikers Island: “Environmentalists visiting this spot might think they died and gone to eco-heaven, but this New York City address is nobody’s idea of paradise” (Martin, 1999). In addition to being an “eco-heaven,” as Martin reports, the jail farm serves as a solution to “solving one of the city’s most intractable problems: getting rid of garbage” (Martin, 1999). The jail complex, as Martin writes, was a prime example of waste management, which was becoming a more pressing problem with the looming closure of Staten Island’s Fresh Kills landfill by 2001. What’s more, it contributes to self-sufficiency, which is “also the main benefit of the other environmental programs at Rikers” (Martin, 1999). But finally, and “even more important, officials here say, are the practical and psychological benefits inmates gain from learning new, possibly money-making skills as well as from the simple pleasures of gardening” (Martin, 1999). Resembling much of the materials examined in the previous chapter, Martin exploits comments from participants of the program who describe the value of the work exceeding the meager pay: “It’s like serenity,” said Frederick Lewis, 45, an inmate who finds that the rewards in his job in the landscaping program go far beyond the 15 cents an hour he is paid. “There’s a sense of freedom” (Martin, 1999). But from the prison guards’ perspective, “the benefit is greater control of potentially unruly inmates,” who describe and attribute less violence to the program. Like today, the 1999 version of the program was restricted to those convicted to non-violent offenses (in 1999, Rikers was a maximum-security prison complex). Martin goes on to describe the everyday tasks between the garden work and classroom, from collecting worms for nests of baby mockingbirds to teaching a course on house plant care (the latter is exclusive to the women’s programs). Ultimately, “In helping to make things grow, Rikers Island is returning to its roots,” Martin writes, referencing the island’s original 90-acre farm owned by the Riker family that eventually expanded to 400+ acres following landfill dumps.

In tracing the recent history of the HSNY program, Martin attributes the 1997 reinstatement to its role in other city programs, such as to “beautify the lawns of landmark Carnegie libraries” while



the society president, Anthony Smith, was a director of South 40 Corporation (the non-profit job placement agency). The significant composting program was also an experiment before apparently rolling out similar programs across the city, in which Martin reports 60,000 meals were mixed with recycled cardboard each day to produce a “yeasty substance that smells like manure,” or fertilizer. The Sanitation Department’s chief of composting described the project as a point of reference for the entire city. Martin, however, had done his homework; noting (however briefly) the history of complaints of odor from composting on the island, “Nobody had to ask the inmates for their view” (Martin, 1999)

The necessary task of dismantling agrarian presumptions in pursuit of ensuring a more accurate reading of material conditions is, as this Chapter has so far demonstrated, a historical one. While the jail garden may very well, and most likely does (considering the individual testimonies) improve circumstances and everyday experiences for its participants, we must recall the enrollment numbers from Chapter 3 in conjunction with the more general news pieces and activist work surrounding violence and mistreatment at Rikers. Now, I will explore reflections of the jail farm in more contemporary media to determine the extent to which the ideologies of agrarianism, particularly as they influence our perception of the source of value, guide current discourse surrounding the jail farm as a tactic of reform.

### **Comparing archival discourse to today**

Aside from the occasional mentions of the jail farm’s ironies, the rhetorical affirmations claiming its benefits (to both prisoners and the prison itself) that I’ve reviewed thus far overlook the jail’s history (the convict labor that built the jail, for example, as Shanahan and Mooney emphasize) and structural conditions (for just one example, Jiler’s account of an ex-participant being sent to a longer sentence upstate following an absurd parole violation). At this point, I have examined portrayals of correctional sustainability programs as published by those maintaining the programs themselves, as well as local news pieces up until the year 2000. Now we will take a look at more contemporary

portrayals of the Rikers jail garden in response to the same types of questions: How does the public media perceive of and portray the garden programs at Rikers Island? Are the programs praised similar to the other portrayals we've seen thus far? That is, does contemporary media attribute their benefits to the proximity to nature/agriculture in addition to just "keeping inmates busy" via labor as we saw in the archival news clips (bringing us back to the discussions on agrarianism and nature-valuation)? Do the programs reference or acknowledge the tainted history of exploiting prisoner labor, the small number of actual participants enrolled, or the conditions at Rikers more generally (which more closely addresses discussions of reform and "carceral humanism")? This section takes contemporary media portrayals to address these questions and continue the central task of this paper: to determine whether, and to what extent, popular social imaginaries of nature and agriculture are fine-tuned to serve reformist measures that ultimately sustain the institution but do little to improve material conditions.

The notion that agricultural work is a step toward returning to the tradition of rehabilitating those imprisoned, a tradition that has been lost, is evident in journalist Rome Neal's 2003 article for CBS News. Describing the GreenHouse as a "\$215,000-a-year program designed to rehabilitate convicts, even though that's out of fashion in many prison systems" Neal sets Rikers apart from and presents it as an anomaly in the carceral state (Neal, 2003). Including descriptions from both Jiler directly and participants of the program, Neal also emphasizes the garden's surroundings: barbed wire, security checks, and strict separation by gender. Neal's findings support those explored in the previous chapter: about 125 inmates go through the program each year; there's a waiting list to get in, and participants are non-violent offenders. Accounts cover success stories (those who found work and did not return to Rikers) as well as the less optimistic ones, those who returned to Rikers or eventually received longer sentences sending them elsewhere. The only image included in the article is that of an African violet flower close-up, no people or barbed wire in sight.

Supporting some of the wider narratives of how sustainability work in prisons and jails influences sustainability more generally, Kerry Trueman for *Civil Eats* notes the programs at Rikers

Island in a short list of New York-based programs that provide a glimmer of hope for the future of the food industry, commenting “Let freedom spring!” (Trueman, 2009). Along similar lines, Rosemary Black describes the Rikers garden as feeding the city of New York via its donations to City Harvest (New York City’s largest “food rescue organization” according to their website). Because production inside jail farms is typically not enough to supply the cafeterias, the majority of the food is donated to local soup kitchen and food pantries, as demonstrated by Black’s article, reporting that most of the food grown at Riker’s is donated to City Harvest, which amounted to 18,000 pounds of fresh vegetables in 2009 (Black, 2009).

Features of the GreenHouse from more “high-brow” food magazines grew in popularity, including *edible Manhattan* to *Food & Wine*, for example. Carrington Morris for *edible Manhattan* summarizes much of the same literature from HSNY’s curriculum guide, referencing the historical use of gardening in hospitals and how HSNY’s programs at Rikers make sure that their programs are, in fact, therapeutic and not just vocational work or grounds keeping. The article opens with a series of visual descriptions leading the reader through the island and into the garden, where we meet one of the gardeners, Wayne. Wayne describes the seedlings he is caring for, followed by Morris’ simplified explanation of Rikers: “the island jail complex currently serves as home and waiting station to approximately 11,000 inmates” (Morris, 2013). Morris provides a brief history of the program, including a quote from one of the therapists explaining that the GreenHouse program is one of the only carceral horticulture programs that is, in fact, therapeutic. Morris also notes the donations to City Harvest, but considers them “in the spirit of what’s called ‘restorative justice’” (Morris, 2013). Morris’ article focuses on testimonies from participants, reflecting on their plans to turn their own yards into gardens once they get home, or finding work in horticulture.

The *Food & Wine* piece showcases five carceral agriculture programs across the country that, much like the CBS News article, includes a close-up image of a plant with the subheading: “Prisons across the country are introducing farm programs to help teach inmates about nutrition, growing food and related life-skills” (Krader, 2017). Krader’s article opens with a reference to the “inmate-run

greenhouse” in the Netflix show, *Orange is the New Black*, stating that the show’s feature of the greenhouse is “appropriate, because that’s what’s happening at a lot of prisons across the country” (Krader, 2017).

Relying on representations of prisons in television, however, can further normalize, and muddle, our associations and understandings of prisons. As Davis draws on cultural critic Gina Dent to assert that “our sense of familiarity with the prison comes in part from representations of prisons in film and other visual media” (Davis, 2003, p. 117). Davis’ discussion includes the inevitable consumption of prison images, even for those who may not directly watch film or television programs, making prison a “key ingredient of our common sense” (Davis, 2003, p. 18).

Krader’s point runs somewhat contrary to Neal’s CBS News article that ran about eight years prior describing the Rikers garden as rehabilitating prisoners despite that rehabilitation had “gone out of fashion” for corrections. Krader stresses the programs’ teachings on nutrition, “how to grow food” and life-skills, but also notes their supply of fresh food to “nearby restaurants and homeless shelters” and effects on recidivism. The five programs Krader features are: Cook County Jail, Chicago; Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility, San Diego; Woodbourne Correctional Facility, Sullivan County, NY; San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA; and finally, Rikers Island. For each program, there is a concise paragraph running through the basic details of the programs, but Krader focuses on food production statistics and recidivism. The emphasis on recidivism bears resemblance to the contradicting rationale asserted by HSNY and Jiler especially: asserting that gardening can teach certain lessons that will reduce repeated incarceration, and therefore, the volume of people incarcerated, contradicts much of the publicly available statistics on arrest and imprisonment (as well as individual accounts of racist, classist, and gendered arrest).

Pieces resonating sentiments from the above abound. A *Psychology Today* article summarizes the Rikers program (including an image from the *edible Manhattan* piece) with an angle stated clearly in the title: “The Rise of Green Prison Programs: How Exposure to Nature is Reducing Crime” (van der Linden, 2015). *Business Insider* summarizes Morris’ article while Michael S. Rosenwald for *The*

*Washington Post* surveys a range of carceral gardens by describing prisons as gardens with “a thriving patch of strawberries, squash, eggplant, lettuce and peppers—just no fiery habaneros, which could be used to make pepper spray” (Rosenwald, 2015). Echoing Krader’s comments on the growth of these programs, Rosenwald continues: “It’s planting season behind bars, where officials from San Quentin in California to Rikers Island in New York have turned dusty patches into powerful metaphors for rebirth.” Rosenwald also notes the tradition of “gardens” in prisons, such as Alcatraz, that “had a lovely one” but disappeared in the 1970s as “experts” suggest “lock-‘em-up-and-throw-away-the-key justice took hold” (Rosenwald, 2015). But in the return to rehabilitative corrections, “prisons without gardens are scrambling to start them.”

Perhaps the most striking piece, for both its photographs and conclusions drawn, is Molly Beauchemin’s 2018 article for *Garden Collage*. The article opens with the following matter-of-fact observation about the role of nature in society: “Gardens have always been a symbol of our shared humanity – from the inspiring metaphors about wilt and rising again and again to the enduring capacity of a flower or greenery to make us feel at ease, there’s something innately transformative about the experience of being in nature” (Beauchemin, 2018). Beauchemin pairs an interview of photographer Lucas Foglia with his photographs from the Rikers garden, or in Beauchemin’s words, Foglia’s “experience trying to capture the paradox between imprisonment and the sense of freedom that nature inherently inspires” (Beauchemin, 2018). But in the first interview question, Foglia does not revert to glorifying the garden over acknowledging the jail itself (like many of the pieces discussed above and even Beauchemin’s own introduction). Instead, Foglia confirms there are three gardens run by HSNY, while “Riots, lockdowns, beatings, and solitary confinement occur in the nearby buildings” (Beauchemin, 2018). Foglia’s responses cite the lower rates in recidivism, a quote from one of the participants describing their preference to spend as much time in the garden as possible, and the admirable work of the GreenHouse Director, Hilda Krus.

When asked about the challenges of photographing inside the jail—both logistically and emotionally—Foglia acknowledges the importance of exposing injustices but also had the fundamental

goal of humanizing the people imprisoned at Rikers Island, breaching harmful stereotypes and instead demonstrating an “example of a positive way forward” (Beauchemin, 2018). Wanting to compel viewers to ask questions and invoke a sense of empathy for the injustices experienced by the garden’s participants, Foglia’s own intentions of photographing GreenHouse enrollees do not prioritize the value of nature for rehabilitation, but rather take the garden scene as a mere backdrop to humanize a sector of the population that is so often actively *dehumanized*. One of the photos that Foglia describes as portraying this intention featured above the title (Figure 4). “I think if we treat people like people,” Foglia writes, “they are far more likely to act morally.” This articulation of the work jail gardens perform differs from many of those explored above (and certainly publications from HSNY) in that it redistributes our perceptions of personal responsibility onto society more broadly. It is only in the closing remarks that Foglia attributes some of this process to nature: “Time in nature can teach prisoners that growth literally and figuratively comes from care” (Beauchemin, 2018).



Figure 4. Featured photo by Lucas Foglia. Source: "Inside the Rikers Island Prison Garden" (2018). Garden Collage Magazine.

### **Odes to agrarianism and correctional rehabilitation: conflating two abstract imaginaries**

The glaring theme made evident across the above examples of reflections on carceral agriculture education programs is the following conclusion: incorporating agricultural activity into jails and prisons asserts a productive step toward returning to a lost, and better, era of rehabilitative imprisonment. But as Angela Davis urges us to remember (as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis), “rehabilitation” may be a fundamental component of the modern-day penitentiary, but the original use of rehabilitation referenced utilizing detention as punishment, as a means to transform individuals who broke (continuously fluctuating) crimes (Davis, 2003). Although the term invokes an optimistic and productive practice, we should reconsider the historical context before taking its use in the carceral state so literally.

I’d also like to comment on an obvious counter-argument to the points made thus far. While the campaigns, declarations, and promises that have coalesced under and surrounding the campaign #CLOSErikers (“#CLOSErikers - New York City Campaign to Close Rikers Island,” 2019) would seemingly easily disprove any argument for or mere question of a paradox that sustainability programs in a given jail or prison potentially help to justify conditions of, and therefore maintain, that jail or prison itself. To this point, and answering the question of what significance can the contradiction between agriculture-based redemption and dehumanizing conditions bring to modern struggles, I’d like to offer two considerations. The official, ultimate closure of Rikers is slated for 2027, six years after the current Mayor de Blasio’s term ends, and is not legally mandated; and second, the recommendations and promises are contingent on bringing to fruition a borough-based jail plan. While the city maintains that the borough jail plan is *not* an expansion plan, a growing base of organizers in its opposition contend that, due to the above two considerations, it could very well end up providing the city with four jails in addition to what currently exists (Critical Resistance, 2018a; Jegroo, 2018). What’s more, the history of Rikers’ development being presented by city officials as the best alternative to collapsing and brutal jail conditions elsewhere might signal a pattern and offer some predictions on the future of new jails under the current status of the carceral state.

Similar to how I read Davis' work as recognizing that there is no "rehabilitative" Eden in which we can return, the example of Rikers Island shows that there is also no idyllic future in which progressive jails will not hold the material condition of oppression for its prisoners.



## **(5) Conclusion, *or* Discovering and Contextualizing Aspirations**

When the Lippman Commission and Mayor de Blasio announced their respective recommendations and plans to close the jails on Rikers Island, they jointly proclaimed the end of an era and start of a new order that would defeat the carceral system as we know it. The plan was, of course, not without stipulation: Rikers could close in ten years (so around 2027) if four additional jails were built across New York City (City Planning Commission, 2019). The plan itself does not mandate that Rikers *actually* ever close, and while land use approval processes are underway to begin construction by 2020, the planned closure date for Rikers falls six years after terms end for de Blasio and the current City Council. This \$10 billion plan to definitely build four additional NYC jails and maybe swap Rikers for them has been met with both well-funded, rallying support (#CLOSErikers, for example) and fierce opposition (#NoNewJails). The #NoNewJails campaign calls out human rights abuses that run rampant across all NYC jails—not just Rikers—and the resulting public scrutiny that demands Rikers close (No New Jails NYC, 2019).

In this thesis, I have explored different initiatives that claim to achieve some version of a new, reformed order in terms of the carceral state, from the non-alternative alternatives analyzed by Schept, the movement of “carceral humanism” as described by Kilgore, to this paper’s ultimate focus on the declarations that agriculture is especially suited to (re)invigorate a project of positive penal rehabilitation. But this thesis demonstrates that these claims are not new and they offer little to change the actual material conditions of racist, classist imprisonment.

In my examination of carceral agriculture education programs—ranging from the NIC Greening Corrections report, HSNY-Rikers partnership and the history of farming at Rikers more broadly, SPP in Washington, and IGP in San Quentin—I found both stark differences and surprising similarities in their ideology and practice. While each initiative’s intentions vary from wanting to use sustainability and agriculture to sustain rising levels of incarceration (as the case of the NIC report) to

claiming agriculture as a means to explicitly oppose the carceral state (IGP), their methodology is likewise rooted in idyllic notions of nature and agriculture.

Drawing on analyses and critiques of agrarianism, sustainability, and commodity fetishism, I have begun to chart just some of the ways in which agrarian imaginaries obscure material conditions, in turn helping to legitimize the carceral state's continued expansion. While each of the initiative's literature recognize the systemic, societal crisis of the mass incarceration and the PIC, albeit to a varying degree, they also advocate a contradicting argument: mass incarceration and the PIC can be resolved via *individual* rehabilitation in the form of agriculture. Their shared reliance on abstract imaginaries of nature and agriculture both foreground agrarian beliefs built on misguided economic analyses as well as prioritizing a neoliberal take on fixing mass incarceration via lessons on personal responsibility.

When a given "thing" or "form" (as Hart and Guthman articulate, respectively) is nature, or more specifically agriculture, it comes with connotations historically expressed, developed, and reproduced by both idyllic movements and critiques of agrarianism and sustainability. Holding nature as an inherent source of moral high ground that, by default, rehabilitates all who take advantage of it, is to have a blatant disregard for social mechanisms that in turn naturalizes practices like mass incarceration and the PIC. That is, to neglect the social relations of which a force like mass incarceration or the PIC is comprised of is to reinforce the notion that said force is natural, autonomous, and unavoidable. What's more, to reinforce a notion that if people only learned to garden they wouldn't be sent to prison (or rather *back to it*, as the programs tend to focus on reducing recidivism), argues quite directly that people are incarcerated entirely because of their own failings, not because of violent oppression and surveillance based on race, class, or gender. Even in the case of food justice organizing that foregrounds the critique of structural conditions of the PIC, as Shicca demonstrates, the priority for achieving concrete transformations is still based on what *nature* can offer on a hyper-individual basis. To urge social change via individuals harvesting in a garden reaches back to ideologies of agrarianism and equates responsibility and well-being with a sense of personal,

private property—and carceral agriculture education programs, despite their intent, reproduce those notions. To cover a more comprehensive analysis from range of perspective, future research would benefit greatly from interviews with the program organizers and participants.

However, despite the contradictions of the claims made by carceral agriculture education programs and public media's interpretations of them, I also discovered a particular, shared understanding and aspiration across the programs that resembles some version of the following: the US carceral state as it exists is a tragedy to our society and health that needs to be overhauled both practically and culturally. In declaring our practices of punishment and lack of useful accountability a crisis, each of the programs relies on agriculture to aspire to a better world in which a societal fulcrum like imprisonment could be transformed into or eradicated and replaced with something that actually benefits and serves individuals. Even the NIC report, which literally claims to use sustainability measures to sustain mass incarceration levels, relies on our imaginaries of the benefits of nature to justify the carceral state—as long as it is one well-equipped with sustainability measures. Half-hearted marketing ploy disguised as reform on the one hand, yet recognition of the public's desire to transform our current “justice system” made evident on the other. While rife with contradictions, HSNY's curriculum guide is fundamentally designed with an intent to help support and empower its participants. SPP may, like HSNY, attribute rates in mass incarceration to some degree of personal failure due to a lack of experience in caring for private property, but it states a central goal of reducing recidivism, promoting education, and building healthy communities. And finally, IGP's mission in California is to facilitate connections to self and community. The aspirations portrayed by each of these organizations is, as discussed in Chapter 4, also taken up and reaffirmed in general media and popular narratives. But what this thesis has hopefully shown, even if only in the most preliminary sense, is that it is not enough to claim that a given thing, or form, rehabilitates individuals and in turn reforms the carceral state for our benefit. In order to effectively work toward the transformations aspired by these programs, they must be understood in terms of their wider, concrete social context.

Taking the practical effectiveness and benefits of these programs into consideration, I follow Schept's concluding remarks in *Progressive Punishment* to suggest that the logics and aspirations motivating abolitionist organizing are likewise identifiable in *non*-abolitionist discourses, such as the carceral agriculture education programs and the media reflecting them. Schept compares aspirations put forth by a local carceral expansion project with that of abolitionist organizing, particularly looking at the work of transformative justice (TJ) and restorative justice (RJ) in an attempt to outline practical ways that communities could "restructure social relations and responses to harm, including crime, to enact abolitionist change and provide the accountability and healing measures needed when harms do occur" (Schept, 2015, pp. 235–236). Foregrounding the work of TJ and RJ, Schept also draws on Angela Davis in asserting that decriminalization and decarceration should ground all community conversations and campaigns about jail and prison reform, not simply heralding certain, unique initiatives as capable of transforming the carceral state (Schept, 2015, p. 236). This method of organizing, as articulated by abolitionists, should be considered fundamental to community organizing against poverty, racism, violence, addiction, and crime—the very social ills that carceral agriculture education programs claim to transform.

In Chapter 3 I introduced and briefly discussed the work known as restorative justice (RJ) that Sbicca references when discussing the role of IGP, but in this last section, I want to consider potential differences between RJ and TJ in the specific context of carceral agriculture education programs. In comparing the aspirations advocated across the carceral agriculture education programs discussed in this thesis with the work of RJ and TJ, my intention is to show how those aspirations are being taken up, theorized, and practiced, by abolition organizers. While there are still stark differences, of course, the comparison also shows us that the organizers of carceral agriculture education programs are not isolated, but rather potentially resonate with a wider, forceful organizing effort. While this comparison may, of course, apply more directly to the work of food justice organizers who aim to oppose the carceral state, it is also useful to consider the language and portrayals put forth by institutions like the NIC in order to garner public support. That is, even those

programs that wish to use sustainability to sustain and legitimize the carceral state's expansion, as outlined here, draw on some of the same aspirations as those hoping to achieve the opposite in order to achieve widespread approval.

Educator and organizer Mariame Kaba's concise definitions of RJ and TJ help to contextualize the aspirations and work of carceral agriculture education programs among abolitionist organizing. The following discussion is brief and is in no way an attempt to represent a formative, substantial comparison. Rather, my hope is to, more simply, gesture toward a potential seed of unity among the programs with RJ and TJ that also works to destabilize carceral logics and hegemony in ways that may have not been explored in the carceral agriculture education programs directly. In an interview with Dan Sloan at *Lumpen Magazine*, Kaba explains: "sometimes people use restorative and transformative justice interchangeably. I very specifically mean very different things when I use restorative versus transformative justice" (Kaba, 2016). Kaba continues to describe restorative justice as that which is "very much grounded in individual relationships between individual people, and solving individual conflicts in a way that would not rely on punishment but still afford people the accountability that they want and need as it relates to feeling as though their harms were heard, and acknowledged, and addressed" (Kaba, 2016). Transformative justice, on the other hand, understands that "individual relationships occur within larger constructs, and there are larger forces that impact our lives, which structure our relationships and out institutions" (Kaba, 2016). Kaba goes on to explain that while TJ addresses interpersonal conflicts, it also makes sure that organizing efforts are tied with concrete understandings of violent oppressions like that of anti-blackness and anti-black racism, racism in general, gender-based oppression, disability-related oppression; TJ is "fighting these macro-level forces" by "organizing that builds power among people" (Kaba, 2016). Finally, TJ recognizes that individual-level attempts to address interpersonal harm and accountability are essential, "but that we'll never be able to solve those personal harms without also doing the macro work, because these things are reinforcing of each other" (Kaba, 2016).

I have consistently showed the ways carceral agriculture education programs place much of their analysis and focus on the individual. And thus, following Kaba's abbreviated definition from one particular interview, it is understandable that Sbicca references RJ at length in his analysis of food justice at San Quentin (rather than drawing on the work of TJ in addition to RJ). However, following Kaba's definition, it is the work of TJ that especially challenges what Schept refers to as "the hegemony of carceral logics" (Schept, 2015, p. 251), by working to transform individual experiences by *simultaneously* challenging macro-level forces. Critiques of RJ abound and differ,<sup>10</sup> and it is not my intention to formulate another, but rather to pose a final question: how might the macro-level work of TJ, in *addition to* RJ, help to substantiate lasting systemic transformations of carceral agriculture education programs? This is a response that requires far more engagement than what can be provided here, but what I have brought to light in this paper is an entry point within the fundamental contradiction of carceral agriculture education programs. Here, the fundamental contradiction of a carceral agriculture education program is, on the one hand the coupling of agriculture as the ideal *abstract* source of transformation and on the other, the obscuring of *concrete* social mechanisms within the carceral state that in turn further legitimizes its expansion and continued crises. The entry point is the simultaneous (however muddled) aspirations to transform, oppose, and destabilize the carceral state signal a potential widespread alignment with the work of prison abolitionists.

As this thesis has shown, carceral agriculture education programs alone do not make formidable changes for either a significant number of individuals nor do they transform or confront the foundations of the PIC. Yet, perhaps there is something concrete in the reimagining of possibilities that can be explored in a way that considers people and systemic transformation as fundamental over an abstract imaginary of agriculture's inherent value. A starting point is in recognizing these shared aspirations and orchestrating connections between movements to genuinely

---

<sup>10</sup> As RJ becomes increasingly widespread and even adopted into some criminal justice systems (as the case in Schept's research site, Monroe County, IN), there have been rising critiques of its appropriation of indigenous restorative justice practices and co-optation for traditional criminal justice systems (Sbicca, 2018; Schept, 2015).

theorize and practice ways to struggle toward a world where caging, even if there is a garden a few yards away, is not our answer—but rather, services and funding for physical and mental health, demilitarization, and education, just to name a few, are. As Angela Davis explains, by shifting our attention from the singularity of the *prison* toward the *prison industrial complex*, we might come up with more (and more effective) actual transformative options. So alas: “The first step, then, would be to let go of the desire to discover one single alternative system of punishment that would occupy the same footprint as the prison system” (Davis, 2003, p. 106).

## Bibliography

- #CLOSErikers - New York City Campaign to Close Rikers Island. (2019). Retrieved February 14, 2019, from <http://www.closerikers.org/>
- ACLU. (2018). Mass Incarceration. Retrieved October 30, 2018, from <https://www.aclu.org/issues/smart-justice/mass-incarceration>.
- Akram-Lodhi, A. H., & Kay, C. (2010). Surveying the agrarian question (part 1): Unearthing foundations, exploring diversity. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 177–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150903498838>
- Alexander, M. (2010). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The New Press.
- Alkon, Alison Hope; Agyeman, J. (2011). Introduction: The Food Movement as Polyculture. In J. Alkon, Alison Hope; Agyeman (Ed.), *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Allen, P. (1993a). Connecting the Social and the Ecological in Sustainable Agriculture. In P. Allen (Ed.), *Food for the Future: Conditions and Contradictions of Sustainability* (First). New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Allen, P. (1993b). *Food for the Future: Conditions and Contradictions of Sustainability*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Asks a City Prison on Rikers Island. (1925, March 27). *The New York Times*.
- Beauchemin, M. (2018, February 19). Inside the Rikers Island Prison Garden. *Garden Collage*.
- Black, R. (2009, September 21). Inmate gardeners at Rikers Island grow vegetable crops that feed the city. *NY Daily News*.
- Blakinger, K. [keribla]. (2019). Unpopular take: As someone who did time, I prefer the word prisoner over incarcerated person. To me, the latter obscures the brutality of imprisonment. The system and often society as a whole doesn't treat us like people and I don't want to pretend that i. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/keribla/status/1110717566887120896>
- Burkett, P. (2003). The value problem in ecological economics : Lessons From the Physiocrats and Marx. *Organization & Environment*, 16(2).
- Butler, J. (2010). Performative Agency. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3(2), 147–161.
- Cannizzo, J. (2010). *Growing with the Garden: A Curriculum for Practicing Horticulture with Incarcerated Individuals*.
- Charlton, L. (1972, April 23). "South 40" Tries to Aid Convicts. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/04/23/archives/south-40-tries-to-aid-convicts-education-program-and-rehabilitation.html>
- City of New York. (2019a). *Smaller, Safer, Fairer: A Roadmap to Closing Rikers Island*. Retrieved from <https://rikers.cityofnewyork.us/>
- City of New York. (2019b). The Plan - Rikers Rikers. Retrieved February 14, 2019, from <https://rikers.cityofnewyork.us/the-plan/>
- City Planning Commission. (2019). *Agenda for the Review Season of the City Planning Commission*. New York, NY. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/about/commission/briefing-package.pdf?r=032519>
- City Turns Dump Into Tree Nursery. (1941, September 11). *The New York Times*.
- Critical Resistance. (2018a). Stop Neighborhood Jail Expansion in NYC. Retrieved February 28, 2019, from <http://criticalresistance.org/stop-neighborhood-jail-expansion-in-nyc/>
- Critical Resistance. (2018b). What is the PIC? What is abolition? Retrieved from <http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/>
- Davis, A. (2003). *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.
- de Blasio, B. (2017). Statement from Mayor Bill de Blasio on Closure of Rikers Island | City of New York. New York: [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/193-17/statement-mayor-bill-de-blasio-closure-rikers-island#/0>
- Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2018). *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*. City Lights Publishers.
- Education as Rehabilitation*. (2019). Retrieved from <http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/wp->



- content/uploads/2015/04/SPP-education-2015.pdf
- EJ. (2019). Personal communication.
- Environmental Education | Sustainability in Prisons Project. (2019). Retrieved March 15, 2019, from <http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/spp-programs-in-washington-state-prisons-v2/what-we-do/education/>
- Farrell, W. M. (1953, April 29). Rustic “Paradise” on Rikers Island. *The New York Times*.
- Feldbaum, M., Greene, F., Kirschenbaum, S., Mukamal, D., & Welsh, M. (2011). *The Greening of Corrections: Creating a Sustainable System. Corrections Today* (Vol. 73). Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://nicic.gov/greening-corrections-creating-sustainable-system>
- From Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 14 August 1787. (2018). *Founders Online*. Retrieved from <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0040>
- Funding | Sustainability in Prisons Project. (2019). Retrieved March 14, 2019, from <http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/about/funding/>
- Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gray, M. (2014). *Labor and the Locavore: The Making of a Comprehensive Food Ethic*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- GreenTeam | The Horticultural Society of New York. (2019). Retrieved February 17, 2019, from <https://www.thehort.org/programs/greenteam/>
- Guthman, J. (2014). *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (Second). Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Hart, G. (2016). Relational comparison revisited. *Progress in Human Geography*, (April), 030913251668138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516681388>
- Holmes, S. (2013). *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* (First). University of California Press.
- Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reforms. (2016). A More Just New York City. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1014613429388>
- Insight Garden Program – Connection through nature. (2019). Retrieved March 15, 2019, from <http://insightgardenprogram.org/>
- Inwood, J., & Bonds, A. (2016). Confronting White Supremacy and a Militaristic Pedagogy in the U.S. Settler Colonial State. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*.
- Island Playground Favored By Walker. (1926, September 18). *The New York Times*.
- Jegroo, A. (2018). Brooklyn Protests Mini Rikers Island As Borough Unveils New Jail Plans. Retrieved February 28, 2019, from <https://shadowproof.com/2018/09/25/brooklyn-residents-protest-miniature-rikers-as-city-unveils-plans-for-borough-jail/>
- Jewkes, Y., & Moran, D. (2015). The paradox of the ‘green’ prison: Sustaining the environment or sustaining the penal complex? <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480615576270>
- Jiler, J. (2006). *Doing Time in the Garden: Life Lessons through Prison Horticulture*. Oakland, California: New Village Press.
- Kaba, M. (2016, April 7). A World Without Prisons: A Conversation with Mariame Kaba. *Lumpen Magazine*.
- Kaeble, D., & Cowhig, M. (2018). *Correctional Populations in the United States, 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus16.pdf>
- Kilgore, J. (2014). Repackaging Mass Incarceration. *CounterPunch*.
- Kilgore, J. (2015). *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People’s Guide to the Key Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time*. New York: The New Press.
- Krader, K. (2017, May 23). 5 Inspiring Prison Farm Programs. *Food & Wine*.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). The Production of Space. In *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lowenstein, R. (2017). Memo. New York, NY.
- Lyon, T. P., & Maxwell, J. W. (2012). Greenwash : Corporate Environmental Disclosure Under Threat of Audit by Thomas P ... Page 1 of 1 Greenwash : Corporate Environmental Disclosure Under Threat of Audit, 5198502439, 1782519.

- Maps Prison Plans Here: Patterson Explains Riker's Island Program to Social Workers. (1930, October 22). *The New York Times*, p. 1930.
- Martin, D. (1999, January 19). Rikers Island Learns to Recycle; Behind Razor Wire, Gardens and a Composting Plant. *The New York Times*.
- Marx, K. (2011). *Capital Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*. (F. Engels, Ed.). Mineola: Dover Publications.
- Morris, C. (2013, July 4). Growing New Lives. *Edible Manhattan*.
- Murakawa, N. (2014). *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*. Oxford University Press.
- National Institute of Corrections. (2011). *Greening Corrections: Creating a Sustainable System*.
- National Institute of Corrections. (2019). Green Corrections. Retrieved from <https://nicic.gov/green-corrections>
- Neal, R. (2003). The GreenHouse Project. *CBS News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-greenhouse-project/>
- New York City Department of Correction. (2019). *Facilities Overview*. Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doc/about/facilities.page>
- New York City Department of Corrections. (2019). *Population Demographics FY19 Qtr. 1*. Retrieved from [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doc/downloads/pdf/FY19\\_1st\\_QUARTER\\_NTRO\\_766.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doc/downloads/pdf/FY19_1st_QUARTER_NTRO_766.pdf)
- New York Correction History Society. (2018). *Rikers Island Had A Farm E-I-E-I-O . . . and still does!* New York, NY. Retrieved from <http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/rikersfarm/rikersfarm1.html>
- No New Jails NYC. (2019). *May 13, 2019 Day of Action: Stop Mayor Bill de Blasio's Jail Expansion Plan*. NYC Department of Correction at a Glance. (2017). Retrieved from [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doc/downloads/pdf/DOC\\_At-Glance-4-27-17.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doc/downloads/pdf/DOC_At-Glance-4-27-17.pdf)
- NYC Service. (2019). Osborne Association. Retrieved March 14, 2019, from [https://www.nycservice.org/organizations/index.php?org\\_id=793](https://www.nycservice.org/organizations/index.php?org_id=793)
- Physiocrat | Definition of Physiocrat by Merriam-Webster. (2019). In *Merriam-Webster* (Online). Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/physiocrat>
- Planting Justice. (2019). Ongoing Projects — Planting Justice. Retrieved March 28, 2019, from <http://plantingjustice.org/education-ongoing-projects>
- Ramey, C. (2018, January 25). New York City Hires Perkins Eastman to Study Jail Design - WSJ. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-city-hires-perkins-eastman-to-study-jail-design-1516924800>
- Restorative Nature | Sustainability in Prisons Project. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2019, from <http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/spp-programs-in-washington-state-prisons-v2/what-we-do/biophilia/>
- Riker's Island a Garden. (1895, August 18). *The New York Times*.
- Riskin, J. (2003). The "Spirit of System" and the Fortunes of Physiocracy. *History of Political Economy*, 35(May), 42–73. [https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-35-Suppl\\_1-42](https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-35-Suppl_1-42)
- Rosenwald, M. S. (2015, July 7). Can gardening transform convicted killers and carjackers? Prison officials get behind the bloom. *The Washington Post*.
- Sawyer, W. (2018). *The Gender Divide: Tracking Women's State Prison Growth*. Retrieved from [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women\\_overtime.html#drugs](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html#drugs)
- Sbicca, J. (2018). *Food Justice Now! Deepening the Roots of Social Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schept, J. (2015). *Progressive Punishment: Job Loss, Jail Growth, and the Neoliberal Logic of Carceral Expansion*. New York: New York University Press.
- Shanahan, J., & Mooney, J. (2018). New York City's captive work force: Remembering the prisoners who built Rikers Island. *International Journal of Law Crime and Justice*, (November), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2018.11.001>
- Smith, N. (1984). "The Production of Nature." In *Uneven Development*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

- Sustainability in Prisons Project. (2019). Retrieved March 14, 2019, from <http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/>
- The Horticultural Society of New York. (2019). About. Retrieved from <https://www.thehort.org/about/>
- The Osborne Association. (2019). About Us. Retrieved March 14, 2019, from <http://www.osborneny.org/about/>
- The Riker's Island Farm. (1895). *The New York Times*.
- The Sentencing Project. (2017). Criminal justice Facts. Retrieved from <https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>
- Trueman, K. (2009, September 29). If You Can't Stand the Heat, Get Into the Garden. *Civil Eats*. Retrieved from <https://civileats.com/2009/09/29/if-you-cant-stand-the-heat-get-into-the-garden/>
- van der Linden, S. (2015). The Rise of Green Prison Programs: How Exposure to Nature is Reducing Crime. *Psychology Today*.
- Vera Institute. (2018). The New Dynamics of Mass Incarceration. Retrieved from <https://www.vera.org/publications/the-new-dynamics-of-mass-incarceration>
- Wachs, A. (2018, January 26). City taps Perkins Eastman to study alternatives to Rikers. *The Architects Newspaper*. Retrieved from <https://archpaper.com/2018/01/city-taps-perkins-eastman-study-alternatives-rikers/>