

During the spring semester (2015) before I began my senior thesis I took the required research methodologies course for my African American studies major. I started to carefully consider the research topic for my thesis well in advance of conducting a literature review. By that point in my career as an undergraduate student I had become fairly knowledgeable about and extremely interested in both incarceration and policing as issues of social justice. During the course of this methodologies class I became determined to write an analysis of the prison system. This analysis was intended to focus upon exploring the prison system's institutions as potential sites of intersectional resistance to structural forms of oppression, particularly liberation struggles against capitalism and racism. I was also especially motivated to focus the content and analysis of my research topic on the criminal justice system as a result of the Ferguson and Baltimore rebellions which occurred that academic year. As both a Baltimore native and a participant in the protests that took place before the rebellion, this particular event served as an emotional and politicizing catalyst for me to begin more earnestly applying my academic knowledge in the realms of political organizing and research. This resulted in me founding a prison abolition student group on campus called Prison Resistance Project (formerly known as Organization of Prison Abolitionists as referenced in my thesis). All of these circumstances, including my prior knowledge and interests, current events, the research methodologies course, and the founding of an abolition organization, were an influence upon my decision to write about the prison abolition movement.

I first began research by checking out relevant books from McKeldin library during the summer on the Prison Industrial Complex and reading them from front to cover. I primarily used the library search engine from lib.umd.edu to discover many or most of these sources. I also combed through some of the library sections for similar sources after finding particular books. I

used Google search, which was helpful for gaining a better understanding of prison abolition organizations and their definitions of the movement as well as perceived root causes of crime. Lastly I used Google scholar which enabled me to find a few relevant articles or publications that were not accessible from the library.

Throughout the academic year I sought assistance from a professor named Dr. Richardson who was my thesis advisor. Dr. Richardson was extremely helpful by providing an initial sense of direction for my research and also suggestions for me when I was feeling stuck. It was his idea for me to include an original study in my thesis and he suggested that I interview local activists or law practitioners such as Eugene Puryear and Dr. Robert Koulish. He also told me to try and get a shot at conducting an interview with Angela Davis, who came to our campus in September 2015. During the fall semester I consistently made an effort to interview these individuals, but after a while it became clear that I would be unable to get a hold of them or actually meet with someone for an interview. It was at this point that Dr. Richardson provided me with the inspiration to interview students on campus instead.

Initially Dr. Richardson and I decided at the beginning of the fall semester that my research topic would be focused on the history of the prison abolition movement. This made things fairly tricky at first because this turned out to be too narrow of a focus for the paper. After conducting a significant part of my literature review and encountering this obstacle, I switched my focus to a socio-political analysis rather than a historical analysis of the movement. This enabled me to select and better utilize many of the sources from my literature review based upon the common thread between sources discussing principles of abolition praxis. This became a driving criteria for my selection of many sources, which grew to include materials from previous

classes that I had become familiar with as well as a lot of information available on the web that evaluated or explained various socio-political theories.

Conducting research for and writing my thesis proved to be the most helpful and exciting experience of my undergraduate academic career. Everything that I learned from this process is now an active form of knowledge which I utilize in educational, political, personal, or academic settings. By enthusiastically and comprehensively engaging in this research process I have become an expert on several different topics and am now highly motivated to pursue a PhD in sociology. I wish to pursue much more extensive research on a multitude of sociological, criminological, historical, and political topics that intersect with prison abolition praxis. I also developed much better skills as a researcher, writer, and editor as a result of my work. Previously the longest paper I had ever written was approximately thirteen or fourteen pages. By the time I finished I had greatly exceeded both the quantity and quality expectations that I had anticipated for myself during this research project. I also exceeded the expectations of the committee and received an A on my thesis paper. While conducting my research I learned a great deal about the process of handling qualitative research, specifically semi-structured interviews. I also became much better at transcribing, coding, and familiarizing myself with the theories and methods pertaining to qualitative studies. As a result of this research process, particularly the extensive literature review that I conducted, I continue to expand upon the knowledge I gained by regularly reading and annotating new literature that can be related in some way to abolition praxis. I have also had many opportunities to apply some of this knowledge in the real world through my activities as a prison abolition organizer. As a result of this research process I became a better leader, educator, and activist through the ways in which I discuss issues and strategize for certain causes.

There is very little about my experience that I would change, except for having a clearer focus and source criteria from the beginning if I were able to do things over. I believe that Library Services was very helpful for finding a lot of my sources. McKeldin provided excellent customer service and also the freedom to use these sources for a long time. I think the library could always improve upon its collection of resources by acquiring additional copies of many books that are often checked out for a long period of time by faculty.