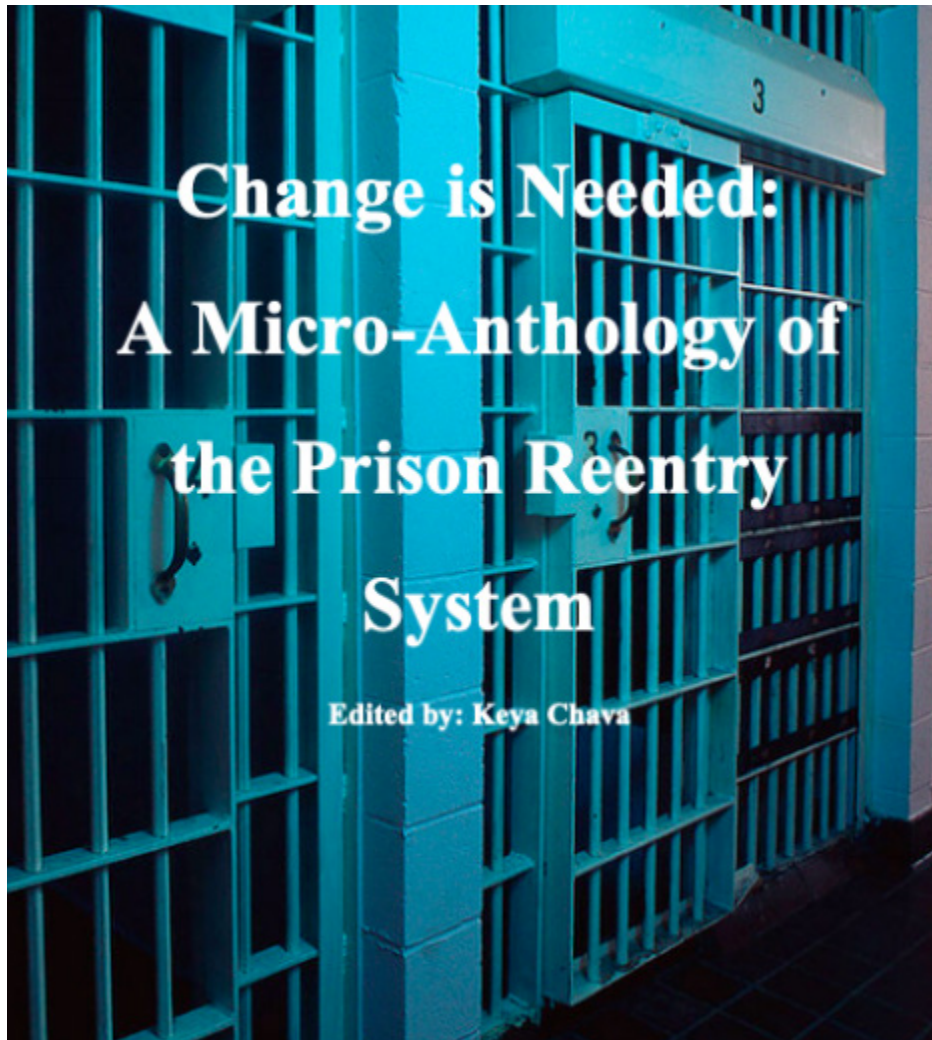




Change is Needed: A Micro-Anthology
of the Prison Reentry System
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Keywords: bibliography, interview mass incarceration, micro-anthology, prison reentry, recidivism, systemic oppression

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Introduction

A Cycle of Recidivism

1. Although many people believe prison is a place to punish lawbreakers, prison is more so a place for retribution and rehabilitation for all types of crimes. There are different types of facilities depending on the severity of the crime where inmates live and spend their sentences. However, "just as there are some 600,000 releases from prison each year, there are approximately the same number admitted to prison on an annual basis" (Austin 315). This is an issue that needs immediate action. Prison should be served as a place where offenders are held accountable for their actions and learn how to not repeat the same mistakes. Instead, the prison system "does not focus on inmate rehabilitation and preparation for release, but on punishment, deterrence, and incapacitation to prevent future crimes" (Seiter and Kadela 363). This model has not been proven to work. In prison, people are punished for their actions while being cut off from the world.
2. There are a limited number of programs that allow for prisoners to participate in rehabilitation, receive an education and be better prepared for when they are released back to society. Because of this, ex-offenders struggle when leaving prison. Without a job, they have no money to find a place to live, and many times, they are unable to find a job because they have been to prison. The cycle needs to be broken which can be attainable with numerous resources and programs during the transition into society. There should be halfway homes and jobs where offenders are not discriminated against. Ex-offenders should be given assistance in order to get back on their feet and not return to previous ways of life that landed them in prison.
3. This issue is relevant because people who have been to prison are part of society. They work right alongside everyone else, have families, friends and live in many communities. These are people who have made mistakes; however, they deserve a second chance. There are many flaws in the reentry system that hinder an ex-offender's ability to succeed once leaving prison including oppression and a lack of resources; to help lower recidivism rates, there should be an increase in prerelease education, rehabilitation and reentry programs.

Lost with Nowhere to Go

4. When ex-prisoners are released, they often have no idea what

they are going to do because they have no job, home or money. This is why it is crucial to create a plan beforehand. Ex-offenders have nothing after leaving prison; because of this along with the stigma associated with people who have been incarcerated, it is much harder to find a job and make a living. I conducted an interview in which I spoke with an ex-prisoner, Max Coffrey, whose name will be altered for privacy purposes. I asked him about what the reentry period looked like for him including the support he received and difficulties he faced. Max did not have any money or a job. The only reason he was “not back there is because [his] fam supported [him] and gave [him] a place to live” (Coffrey). This is an example of someone having a difficult time during the transition back into society. He did not receive any help from programs or other resources. Instead, he had to rely on his family, and for many ex-offenders, they do not have one. There were many times where Max said he wanted to give up because “it was hella hard getting a job” (Coffrey) and applications would always ask about previous convictions. He ended up working with a friend, painting and pressure washing houses in order to make money. His only support was his family, no assistance from programs or help from anyone else. This is a problem because many people do not have a family and are not able to turn to anyone. The only assistance they might be able to receive is from programs. Although assistance programs are extremely beneficial to an ex-offender getting back on their feet, one could contend that if programs provide an excess amount of assistance, the ex-prisoner may rely solely on the assistance. However, the benefits of assistance outweigh the disadvantages. When these programs do not exist or have a lack of resources, ex-offenders become lost during reentry.

5. In a testimony published by a reentry advocates page, a former inmate said that he has “been in and out of prison 3 times. And the first two times, [he] didn’t have any plans. [His] reentry plan was to go right back to where [he] got picked up from.” (Basille). His testimony shows that prisoners do not know what to do after being released from prison. Similar to Max, they have no plan and no money, and decide to go back to where they were when arrested which is how they are looped back into their old ways and are often reincarcerated. This often happens during the first months after release.

The Brutal First Days

6. Studies show that there is a “feedback loop” where mass

incarceration leads to “criminogenic environments” which damages chances for former prisoners to have a “successful reentry and reintegration” (Jonson and Cullen). In order to beat the cycle, a successful reentry program must be created in which prisoners are assisted and helped back on their feet instead of being thrown back to the exact place they were arrested in the first place. In Londale Walton’s testimony, he says “those first thirty days are imperative. Those first thirty days are where the decisions are made, whether you are gonna make it or break it” (Walton) emphasizing the significance of having a plan for reentry and following through with it. In prison, there needs to be programs where people are able to create a plan for when they get out so that they know how to get their life on track and not revert to old habits.

7. A youtuber, Jessica Kent talks about her first year out of prison and like Basille, she had no plan when leaving the facility. Jessica says her first day out was the scariest because she didn’t have transportation, clothes, an ID or family and friends. Luckily, she figured out a job, but was not allowed to cash her checks in because she did not have an ID leaving prison. Because of this, Jessica could not afford food. However, “In Arkansas, you’re not allowed to get any kind of assistance at all if you have a drug charge” (Kent), which prevented her from obtaining food stamps. Circumstances such as this make it extremely difficult to make it. Many of Jessica’s days, she wished she could just sell drugs because it was the easy way out and all she knew. If there was education about these possible issues, ex-offenders would be able to prepare themselves and know how to get assistance and overcome these obstacles. This is where a reentry plan would be crucial to ensure that people are on the right path and are able to create a living for themselves, especially when they start to face oppression caused by their incarceration.

History of Oppression

8. When people return from prison, they are oppressed because of their criminal charges making it more difficult to find opportunities. During the transition period, many prisoners return to their homes and previous communities because of familiarity. Unfortunately, “the world to which they return is drastically different from the one they left” (Seiter and Kadela 361). Once someone has been convicted, they are often not seen the same way again causing them to struggle. They need to be given opportunities and chances just as anyone else would have to succeed, not only in the beginning of reentry, but throughout their lives as well. After being released,

slaves “were given documents saying they were free” (Coogan and Belton), however, they still had to flee because they did not have enough of an education in order to not be enslaved again. This is similar to a prisoner’s story. Although inmates may still do a few classes and learn, they do not gain enough of the tools they require for survival. They are not only excluded from society, but “like being a former slave in slave territory, the ex-offender will continue to be a target for incarceration”(Coogan and Belton), indicating that there is a never ending cycle.

A New Focus

9. Prisoners need access to assistance and education that allows them to understand how to thrive in their communities throughout the transition period. Parole and alternative ways for people to be held accountable for their actions would be a great way to help with this situation. Despite this knowledge, the focus is on sending people to prison and creating lengthy sentences, “mandatory minimums” and the “abolition of parole” (Austin 314). With more parole options available, there would be assistance for ex-offenders throughout their reentry process where they can be held accountable and have support where they can ask questions and get educated.
10. There could even be programs where people who have already been through the reentry process can guide other ex-offenders who are currently going through it. Currently, there are assistance programs in place that have helped many prisoners, but there needs to be more that are put into practice earlier, are specific, cover a vast amount of material and are implemented on a larger scale to reduce recidivism. Certain programs are proven to work; however, many programs have underlying problems which prevent inmates who are eager to learn, from doing so.
11. However, while everyone should be helped in some kind of way, it can be argued that because the crimes people have committed are so drastically different, not everyone should have the same treatment with the amount of support and assistance they receive. Someone who stole food for their hungry kids and another person who might have murdered someone do not have an equal crime rate. The issue of how much assistance each person may deserve is a controversial topic in many people’s eyes. Along with the disputed issue of varied deservence, programs also have various success levels.

The Truth Behind Programs

12. There are many programs that are proven to be effective, however there are others that are a facade. One of these facilities was written about in the book "Writing our Way Out" by Coogan and Belton. Indian Creek Correctional Center is located in Virginia and is a renowned rehabilitation facility. "it is the largest therapeutic community inside prison walls anywhere in the world" and "on paper, the facility sounds quite impressive" (Coogan and Belton 209). However, in real life, it is a place filled with drugs and has not helped many people. Counselors themselves subtly share that the program is a sham. A prisoner in the program said that he was "looking forward to educating [himself] about the dichotomous arguments relating to addiction and how they have, or have not, affected [his] own perception of the criminal drug lifestyle that [he has] been a part of for most of [his] juvenile and adult life" (Coogan and Belton 210). If this program was led the right way, it could have been an amazing facility where thousands of people are helped. However, because of all the drugs and other activity in the facility, it is extremely hard for people looking to receive help, to actually obtain it. Counselors and correctional officers who actually care about improving the program and creating better opportunities for inmates are a crucial part of the success of reentry programs.
13. Many ex-offenders want to give back to their community and assist inmates during the reentry process but because of many restrictions, are not able to do so. Programs where former prisoners share their stories and give beneficial information would deeply help current inmates because they have been through the process and are the only people who fully understand. One anthropology on prisoner reentry argues "that an equipped, skilled, and committed former offender is usually far better able to assist another former offender through the transition phase than someone only intellectually exposed to the experience" (Ducksworth 560). Although counselors and other officers have seen a lot about the process of reentry, they do not know everything as they have not had to experience it themselves. A mixture of education from former offenders as well as people who have studied reentry would be a great addition to current resources.

Increase the Scale

14. All states have a prerelease program, but many times, "participation in the programs is voluntary and is available to only a

small portion of inmates” (Austin 324). An increase in the number of participants allowed and more mandatory meetings would help to educate prisoners on a larger scale. For example, Georgia has “several ‘transitional centers,’ but only 700 inmates” (Austin 324) are there at a time. If these centers were larger, a lot more inmates could receive assistance. Texas also has a program where they have a separate school district where prisoners can enroll in classes and gain their GED. “Approximately 75,000 inmates participated” and of the people who took the GED, “67% passed” (Austin 323). The Texas program and others have helped thousands to learn English, become proficient in other subjects to help prisoners become better prepared for reentry where they need jobs. However, with the increased scale of programs comes an increase in costs, taxpayers’ money are going to all of these resources and it can be argued that money going towards prisoners who have made poor decisions is unethical. Despite this point, no matter the person it is important to give assistance so there are less mistakes made by ex-offenders in the future.

What Would Work

15. Possible ways to improve reentry are through programs where there is assistance every step of the way from while incarcerated to even a year after being released from prison. Max Coffrey believes that some ways to improve the reentry process is through having resources that are easily accessible. He says that “many prisoners can get assistance, but it’ll take months and they have to apply and go through a whole process so it’s a lot easier to just do what they have always did” (Coffrey). Another resource that has potential are halfway houses. They allow for ex-offenders to live in a home with others in the same boat and work while having support. Max thinks this program can be great at times, however “a lot of them you have to pay for. But with what money. I just left prison. I don’t have money so i can’t pay 300 a month right away on top of other shit like food” (Coffrey). He also explained that programs where they help former inmates find jobs are really beneficial. Jobs can be tough to find for former inmates; when there are people who assist with that process, it is much easier for ex-offenders to get their lives on track.
16. There is a prestart program in Illinois that has two phases, the first being “prerelease education” and the second being “post release assistance.” The reincarceration rates showed a “success of 12% for the treatment group and 32% for the control group” (Seiter

and Kadela 379) which is a huge change. This study proves that programs like this work and that if they were implemented across the country, it would be extremely helpful in lowering recidivism. If more funding is allocated for such programs, it will become a possibility to increase their sizes and implement them in more areas. These studies should be referenced by officers and they should “implement or expand the use of vocational training and/ or work release programs, drug rehabilitation programs, education programs, halfway house programs, and prerelease programs that have proven success” (Seiter and Kadela 380). Many of the funding for incarceration goes towards housing and building new facilities rather than rehabilitation or education programs.

Why It Matters

17. There are hundreds of thousands of people who are incarcerated every year. These are people that are in our lives and communities. It is important that people are educated about the issue of high recidivism rates, why this is happening, problems the system currently has and how it can be improved. When prisoners are released, they often have no plan because they were not educated well enough in prison and face a new kind of oppression when back in society that causes them to fall back to their old ways. There currently are programs that are in place to combat this, but are sometimes ineffective, optional or very limited. To increase education and resources, the programs that do work need to be funded better and implemented on a larger scale. There should be resources easily accessible and altered based on how effective they are. The transition is crucial for people learning how to survive in society and currently has many flaws. As the prison reentry system issue is further discussed, the questions of how programs can be effectively implemented on larger scales and how the necessary funds are going to be obtained will be explored.

Glossary

Halfway House: A transition center where ex offenders learn skills necessary to support themselves in society.

Offender: A person who did something to break the law.

Parole: The partial freedom of an inmate where they are released but still have strict

Prison: A place where people who have broken the law are held for punishment and retribution

Program: An operation with many resources for a certain purpose or goal

Recidivism: A criminal who has been convicted of a crime again

Rehabilitation: A process in which a person gains help in order to change their behavior

Release: The action in which a person is set free or let out from confinement

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Micro-anthology is important because it is a collection of different ideas and works that come together to create a vision with many points of view.

Micro-anthology creates diverse works with many materials which allows for a deeper understanding of a certain topic.

Keya Chava is currently a first student at Virginia Tech studying Psychology. As a career, she would love to study the science behind addiction. Her other passions include prison reform and the Rwandan Genocide.



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Project Three: Micro-Anthology (Research Project)
ENGL 1106: First-Year Writing--Writing from Research
(Dr. Greene Spring 2021)

Important Dates

1. March 24 by 11:59 pm: Half Draft (1000 words/4 pages) due.
2. March 29 by 11:59 pm: Peer-Review Draft (2000-2500 words/8-10 pages) + all sources due.
3. April 11 by 11:59 pm: Final Draft (2000-2500 words/8-10 pages) + Invention Portfolio due.

Requirements

[\(Link to Dr. Greene's Example.\)](#)

1. "Book Cover" with title and editor's (your) name
2. Table of Contents
3. Introduction (2000-2500 words/8-10 pages) + citation of at least one primary research + 5-7 sources cited in-text + at least one figure (image, chart, sound recording, or video created by the writer) + MLA Works Cited page
4. Glossary of 5-10 key terms with brief definitions
5. MLA Bibliography of the 5-7 selections included in the anthology [4 academic sources, and 3 popular sources--don't ignore songs, documentaries, films, YouTube videos, tik toks, or other media that touch on your topic.]

6. “Back Cover” with 2 “fictional” blurbs and a brief bio (3-5 sentences) of the editor (you)

How this project meets the course outcomes

The project touches on rhetorical performance, research processes, style conventions, multimodal design, and reflective interaction outcomes. The development of this project draws inspiration from *Understanding Rhetoric* Issue 2: Strategic Reading (pp. 84-93), Issue 4: Argument (pp. 154-180), Issue 6: Research (pp. 219-255), Issue 7: Rethinking Revision (pp. 260-278), and handouts linked on the course syllabus. Students will practice developing and drafting their project via the invention portfolio, and students should refer to the models discussed in class to aid them in completing the research paper.

Overview of Project and Requirements

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “anthology” once meant a collection of flowers.¹ A collection of beautiful objects. Something of value. We consider an anthology a print collection of stories, articles, or other written materials. All of us have interacted with an anthology, whether in previous educational experiences or at the present moment this semester at VT. Anthologies are important texts that allow for an introductory or deep dive into a topic or area of interest.

Using your the topic you proposed in Project One and began researching in Project Two, you will create a micro-anthology to contextualize its place within the broader course theme of Issues of Equity in the Human Condition. The project will take the shape as a digital book. You will create a cover, a table of contents, an introduction (the major written piece of the project), a glossary of terms, a bibliography, and a back cover with blurbs. Below you can find a detailed description of each component:

- Cover: The cover should be the first page of your Google Doc. Use an image you create or use an image from [Creative Commons](#), citing accordingly. To create the cover, you can use [Google Draw and embed the image into your draft](#). The title should be included on the cover in the following format--Attention-grabbing element: Specific Topic (ex.: Going Hungry No More: A Critical Micro-Anthology of Food Deserts in Virginia). Your name should appear on the cover in the following manner: edited by [your name] (ex.: edited by Justin Greene)

¹ "anthology, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/8369. Accessed 8 January 2021.

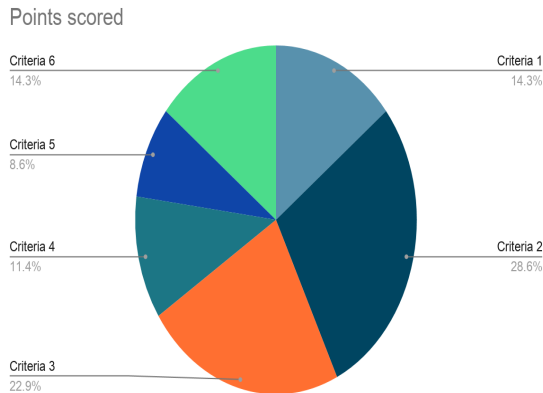
- Table of Contents: The table of contents should list all of the elements of the anthology in the order you determine they will appear. Refer to any table of contents as an example.
- Introduction (2000-2500 words/8-10 pages, not including the Works Cited page): This is the main written part of the project. In this section, you will contextualize your topic and the discourse around it--your primary research and your secondary sources. The introduction should follow the following format, using subheadings for each section:
 - Context: In this section, you will provide insight into the background and relevance of your topic. Think about the following questions: what is involved in the topic/issue? How does it work? What is the main aim of bringing these pieces together? Why is the topic/issue relevant, timely, and important enough to warrant a collection of this manner? You may want to consider using a piece of primary research or secondary research in this section.
 - Concept Review: In this section, you will provide insight into **two** main concepts that the topic/issue contains. This section is basically a literature review--a place that discusses the main concepts raised in the sources and the reasons for their importance. You will need to include your primary research--survey, interview, or sitework--in this section, and you **must cite at least 5 secondary sources** that will be included in your micro-anthology.
 - Conclusion: In this section, you will reinforce the importance of your micro-anthology: what is the main goal of the collection? Where does this collection fit into the larger intellectual discourse? Why is this collection necessary and valuable to the audience at this moment in time?
- Glossary: The glossary should contain 5-10 key terms the selections of the anthology touch on. Return to your Brooke Notes and mine them for terms to include. The definitions should be created by you.
- Bibliography: The bibliography should use MLA format to cite each selection included in your micro-anthology. There should be 5-7 selections cited--4 academic articles and 3 popular sources. Don't ignore songs, documentaries, films, YouTube videos, tik toks, or other media that touch on your topic.
- Back Cover: The back cover should be the last page of your Google Doc. Use Google Draw to create it. You can use the same image as the front cover. On this page, create two blurbs about the importance of the micro-anthology and create a short (3-5 sentence) biography of you, the editor.

You will need to assess seriously the rhetorical situation of this project: why is your topic/subject significant? Who is your intended audience? What is your purpose? What is your identity as the writer/editor? What is the context around your topic/issue? What is the message you intend to convey with this project? It may help to image your audience as an educated group of like-minded but skeptical readers. You will need to take into consideration the needs of the audience to successfully achieve your purpose. Creating a clear and well-developed thesis to guide your work is important, not only for the audience but for you as the writer/editor. A good thesis provides you with the blueprint to build the paper.

The length of this project needs to be taken seriously to avoid unneeded repetition and unnecessary filler, so organization is key to staying on track. Provide sufficient background and advance from that standpoint into your main points in the introduction. Make sure that you provide yourself with broad enough points to incorporate primary research, multiple sources, and sufficient interpretations and analyses, making sure to provide relevant examples for a number of primary sources within your topic area. That said, you should avoid vague and general language; you want specificity in order to support the main ideas. Try to develop your writing to move between deductive reasoning to inductive reasoning.

Any idea you do not think of must be attributed to the source or sources it comes from to avoid plagiarism. Rely on quotes to provide emphasis or credibility to your paper, and accurately summarize and paraphrase source material to maintain consistent tone and voice. Don't let sources speak for themselves: explain how they relate to your thesis and how sources relate to one another, for example extending a source's argument, providing a counterpoint, or creating new knowledge from previous work. Treat your sources as ways to legitimize your work within the larger discourse that has, is, and will take place around the topic/issue.

Criteria for Grading



Criteria 1 (5 points): The project presents a well researched topic/issue/controversy. It shows attention to the rhetorical situation.

Criteria 2 (10 points): The project presents a clear thesis that is supported with fully analyzed primary and secondary sources. The project exhibits clear planning in the use of sources. Each line of argument and support is relevant to the larger point and purpose of the project.

Criteria 3 (8 points): The project synthesizes both primary and secondary sources coherently. The writing uses summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation effectively. The writer's voice and the sources' voices mix fluidly.

Criteria 4 (4 points): The project follows the specific requirements listed on the guidelines. The project is well organized and meets other min. standards.

Criteria 5 (3 points): The project adheres to models of correctness--organization, grammar/mechanics/syntax, and citation formatting.

Criteria 6 (5 points): The invention portfolio is completed in a timely manner, and it shows a progression in development.

Invention Portfolio Checklist

1. Week Seven - Examining Research Methods due Mar. 7 by 11:59 pm
2. Week Eight - Practicing Fieldwork due Mar. 14 by 11:59 pm
3. Week Nine - Refining Fieldwork due Mar. 21 by 11:59 pm
4. Week Ten - Half Draft due Mar. 24 by 11:59 pm
5. Week Eleven - Peer-Review Draft due Mar. 31 by 11:59 pm
6. Week Twelve - Reflection due April 11 by 11:59 pm

Instructor: Justin Greene (Instructor)

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Note: The citation information on p. 1 follows modified APA, incorporating the writer's full name as an acknowledgement of a more fully humanistic regard for authorship.

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