

CREST Residential Fellowship Application Cover Sheet
Academic Year 2011-2012

Name David Rice
Rank Associate Professor
Department English
Campus address 423 Western Ave.
Campus phone [REDACTED] Home phone [REDACTED]
Email address [REDACTED]
Previous CREST Residential Fellow? no If yes, give year _____

Title of Research Project "IF I Ever Hope to Leave This Place, I Must Tell What I Know": Witness and Survival in Mikal Gilmore's Shot in the Heart
Application materials:

- a. One copy of proposal narrative of roughly 1,500 words with cover sheet attached. Proposals should describe the project clearly and concisely for a multidisciplinary evaluation panel and address its relevance to current directions of research in the field. Please double-space proposals and use a 12-point type.
- b. One copy of bibliography not to exceed one page.
- c. One copy of *curriculum vitae*

Note to department heads:

- a. Residential Fellows will be released from one course during the fellowship year.
- b. This semester will tentatively be Fall 2011 or Spring 2012 (please circle one)

We are discussing this in relation to other needs. may be changed.

Department Head signature Catherine Cavanaugh
Printed CATHERINE CAVANAUGH

If appointed in two departments:

Additional Department Head signature N/A

Printed _____

Signature of Applicant David Rice

Applications must be received by Tuesday, November 23, 2010

Please mail to:

Dr. John Williams-Searle, Director
Center for Citizenship, Race, and Ethnicity Studies (CREST)
The College of Saint Rose
432 Western Avenue
Albany, NY 12203-1490

Scholarly Context

This proposed project is an extension of research I've been doing over the last six years into the pedagogical and ethical concerns involved in teaching prison narratives. In the last decade, interdisciplinary research in prison studies has been growing as the US prison population itself has grown. Moving beyond the useful but dated model of the panoptical structure of power outlined in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, current trends in prison studies seek to examine the ways that previously discreet state and federal departments of corrections have evolved into a globalized corporate model that seeks profit and expansion as well as discipline and punishment. Important works of history and cultural criticism, such as Christian Parenti's *Lockdown America*, have emerged to trace the development of this system. In my field of literary study, a good number of anthologies and critical studies have recently been published exploring the ways narratives are used by prisoners to speak to their experience in the system. The novelist Wally Lamb has edited two collections of writing from women inmates in his prison writing class. The PEN/American Center has produced a collection entitled *Doing Time*, featuring some award-winning pieces by inmates. Quentin Miller's collection of critical essays on prison writing, *Prose and Cons*, has provided an important update to literary scholarship on the subject. Many memoirs by current and former inmates have been published in recent years as well. These texts are fraught with unique complications for the reader, due to the often ethically complex position of the incarcerated narrator, and thus of the narrative.

My main interest in this vein has to do with the ways such narratives challenge readers to step outside of dichotomous notions of justice and examine crime and punishment in more ambiguous ways. When I first taught my course in American prison writing six years ago, my reading list was heavy with such texts. In the class, we read slave narratives, Parenti's book, and first-person narratives by Jimmy Santiago Baca, Leonard Peltier, and the women represented in the Wally Lamb edited anthology *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*. All of these texts spoke to the effects of incarceration on individuals and society and the role of the arts as a source of potential healing and empowerment for inmates. My students proved sympathetic readers of most of the texts, with the main exception being Mumia Abu-Jamal's collection of essays, *Live from Death Row*. Many students didn't trust him or his narratives, which limited their engagement with his journalistic essays on the complex injustices and inadequacies of the American prison and justice systems.

In his introduction to Abu-Jamal's text, the novelist John Edgar Wideman assesses the challenges of the book for readers like my students. He contrasts the text with contemporary African American neoslave narratives, which, according to Wideman, "serve the ambivalent function" of slave narratives by foregrounding black individuals' struggles for freedom apart from the larger ideological, political, and economic networks that enable slavery to take place (xxx). For Wideman, this view of black lives "at best ignores, at worst reinforces, an apartheid status quo" where divisive dichotomies of class and race are not adequately called into question and analyzed (xxx). Wideman praises Abu-Jamal's writing for "question[ing] matters left untouched by most of the popular stories of black lives decorating bookstores today" (xxx).

Of the narratives we read for the class, the majority followed the general trajectory of neoslave narratives as Wideman outlines them. Most were honest portrayals