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Inside prisons, time is slow. People mark time, struggle to accrue good time, and imagine ways to make up for lost time with loved ones. Time lingers: waiting to be “keyed out,” waiting for a letter, waiting for a hearing, waiting to get through the gates, waiting for a visitor. Time works against people, particularly the non-white and the poor: select nine-year-olds become juveniles culpable for their actions, some fifteen-year-olds are tried as adults, and people struggle to survive sentences of eighty years (equivalent to a natural life, yet not sentenced as such). If sentenced before or after the signing of specific laws, one can serve vastly more or less time. Mandatory minimums, indeterminate sentences, “truth in sentencing,” parole, and probation all produce specific kinds of time: “hard” time, surveilled time, analogue time, stretched time.

While the 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States experience slowed time, other “free world” segments of the population experience frenetic time. Just-in-time production, contingent and flexible labour contracts, and digital devices elongate hours of labour and force some to be perpetually at work. Networked machines require attention in many places at once, transporting messages, demanding responses. “I’m so busy” is the acceptable and assumed professional knowledge workers’ response to “how are you?” Time-management seminars, ebooks, apps, and workshops—tools of acquiescence that increase surveillance, management control, and work speed—seem dangerously useful for helping some navigate the frantic patterns of work-motion.

Others across the carceral continuum<sup>1</sup> also experience work speed-up, heightened surveillance, and devalued time. The push to raise the minimum wage in the U.S. highlights the question: what is the base price for one’s labour, for our working time? While the federal government sets this at an already low \$7.25 an hour, many—including undocumented or temporary workers, day-labourers,

nannies, and others—cannot access even this wage. Their time, disposable and cheapened, is integral to the accelerated “good life” promised by the global city.

Once coveted by workers, time was made visible in the labour movement’s slogan, “Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, and eight hours for what we will.” United Auto Workers’ political education materials from the 1950s included posters with the message to work less for equal pay: “Fight automation fallout with fewer hours and no loss in pay.” Union reformers encouraged policies that would give time to “do with what we will” for the citizenry to participate in democracy. But time for “what we will” still needs defending. The “fierce urgency of now,” in Martin Luther King’s words, often makes claims for time to life and pleasure feel impossible. When we are all free we can rest and play, right?

Institutions shape free and unfree worlds and lives across the carceral continuum. In an era of radically unequal unemployment, underemployment, and compensation, speed-up and overwork is the norm—in contrast with the temporal slow-down inside the controlled conditions of penal institutions. Often locked up during the peak of their working years, between the ages of twenty and forty, non-white poor people and/or others are marked as superfluous to the workforce, yet central to a carceral nation.

Contradictory engagements with time are also reflected in the movement to reform or end prisons and policing, and build radical alternatives. When we make demands for abolition, we are told—even from allies in the struggle—to ask for less, to slow down, to wait, to be practical. Such discursive responses are the signposts of late capitalism created by an economic apparatus able to control the clock. Building abolition futures in the present requires not only time (and the refusal to wait), but rethinking how our prison nation uses time against us. In Cruising Utopia, José Esteban Muñoz (2009) writes that, “queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.” “We are not yet queer,” he writes, “but we might use its possibility to help us imagine a future, and to make our futures in the present.”<sup>2</sup> Requiring more than a radical imagination, abolition asks us to live as if we were already beyond this punishing time. Multi-faceted and out of time,

this work is not simply about eliminating prisons or closing jails. As theorists Stefano Harney and Fred Moten write, the abolition of our prison nation necessitates making and thinking of "the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage."<sup>3</sup>

How is time a central aspect of discipline, mobility, social segregation, and punishment? How do we not simply mark time, but interrupt or steal time and resist the retributory ticking logic? Below we offer an on-going, experimental glossary of entries from scholars and artists, some currently incarcerated, who have thought about time, labour and freedom during a year-long art inquiry/class at a prison in Illinois. An invitation from a local museum, the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, prompted the class to consider histories of time and labour from the reform era in the U.S., when ideas of free time were connected to one's ability to participate in a democracy. How might a group of people articulate time and freedom in an unfree space? Is the speed-up of time and inability to shape a collective political future in the free world connected to "doing time" and "state time"? Many of the resulting entries are descriptive, while others theorize time. Some contributions are authored by one person, and some are melded, written by many. Names are removed from individual entries in order to create a plural or polyvocal effect. Dissimilar voices and experiences are intertwined, reflecting some shared contexts, but also varied experiences within and across the carceral continuum. Our glossary is provisional, incomplete, and the contributions invite engagement. As a partial constellation, these entries aim to provoke an on-going interrogation of how time, tinkered with and manipulated, narrowly structures our collective existence.

## Day Time

[Figures 68–69, pp 200–201]

This timeline details every thirty minutes of the day, with detailed illustrations of specific times. In one such articulation, freedom is found only in the artist's sleep/dreams.

## Enough Time

How much time is enough time? How much time does it take for one to recognize his faults, that he was wrong and condemned himself? How much time does it take for a man to renounce his old ways of living and thinking and repent? To turn to a new, positive being, a new positive way of thinking? Why is it that a man in his 40s, 50s, and 60s is still doing time for something he did when he was in his teens and 20s when he's not the same person anymore?

If time moves along, why is it still standing still on a piece of paper for me? I'm sentenced to a natural life sentence. As time goes on our side, I'm still stuck in a time frame that I did my crime in. Why does the time to mourn, the time to grieve, the time to unforgive and hold hatred trump the time to forgive and heal and restore? There's a time to let go, and society holds onto this condemnation of criminals.

A verse in the bible, Ecclesiastes 3:17-18, says there's a time and a season, a time for every purpose under heaven, a time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant, a time to pluck up what's planted, a time to kill, a time to heal, a time to break down, a time to build up, a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance, a time to cast stones and a time to gather stones, a time to embrace, a time to refrain from embracing, a time to get, a time to lose, a time to keep, a time to cast away, a time to rend, a time to sew, a time to keep silent and a time to speak. Time to love and time to hate. A time of war and a time of peace. My question: there is a time to incarcerate, but when is the time to let go?

## Feeling Time

Categories of labourers—from volunteer college educators to paid imprisoned workers that process paperwork and clean floors—reproduce the state functions of incarceration and mimic services that have shrunk under economic restructuring. Let's take these two examples.

The college educator: Each week a group of artists, writers, and scholars pass through four gates run by unionized prison guards to enter the small world of a big prison. Gaining access to a

state prison requires criminal background checks and no prior arrests or convictions, TB tests, drug tests, and an agreement not to write to or visit anyone in another state prison, ever again. Once inside the front gates we shuffle through a timeline that materializes the carceral project on a small scale: buildings constructed in the 1920s, 1940s and 1980s. Far from the entrance gate is the crumbling school building where we teach college-level art, writing, and humanities courses as non-paid workers, volunteers. Most of us teach at area universities and state colleges where the undergraduate tuition price tag is between \$7,000 and \$45,000 per year. At the prison we work for free.

The imprisoned worker: prisons are partially operated by people locked inside. Both physical and affective, this labour includes the everyday maintenance of the people and the prison. The daily work of keeping the place clean, food cooked, and the administration of all kinds of activities—including the volunteer taught college classes—is all done by “selected inmates.” The pay is horrible: the Prison Policy Initiative identifies that the average minimum pay of a prisoner per day is \$0.93 and the maximum is \$4.73.<sup>-4</sup> But in such a constrained environment, these jobs are often coveted because it means time out of a cell to move around, talk with others, and sometimes, as many identify, be treated as a colleague.

These sets of workers assure the business as usual of the carceral state. State and federal agencies have largely stripped funding for art, education, mental-health services, and recreational opportunities—both within and outside prisons. Thus in the prison we *volunteer* teach. Prison needs the almost free labour of those caged within to function. Without the bodies and the work of imprisoned people, prisons would not exist. Our *teaching* bodies extend and naturalize the prison, and this labour is sometimes justified by volunteers through the affects of care and love.

Yet simultaneously the possibility of exceeding these everyday constraints also exists. As a connection with the outside world, college classes provide forms of educational support and make another link between free and unfree spaces, reminding outside communities (some of which rarely feel the impacts of the widespread confinement in our society) that indeed, prisons exist. Imprisoned workers create expanded infrastructural capacities to

add to the limited offerings provided by prison chaplains or volunteer coordinators, whose positions still barely exist in the state-prison budget. The time offered by both is critical, lifesaving even, in a place where segregation, depression, and state violence are common.

Yet this affective labour and its corresponding humanistic logic subsequently reinforce the carceral continuum. What does it mean to offer care and to listen, yet be unable to alter the dominant and inhumane power structures? What does it mean to be a temporary and mercurial buffer between the institutional forms of state violence and people's bodies? Might caring mobilize particular logics—punitive and otherwise—that knit people into compromising relationships with work, the state, and each other? But, perhaps, on some days, this feeling time can also change the state, push up against its power, and restructure its logics, in due time.

### Floor Time

[Figure 70, p 202]

This timeline describes a week spent in specific spaces in a cell. As prisoners are bunked two per cell, and sometimes locked in the cell all day, dividing and negotiating the space becomes a delicate balance of relationship and need.

### Food Time

[Figure 71, p 202]

This timeline records the artist's memory of changing food options in prison starting in the 1980s.

### Growing Time

Being a shortie, someone with less time, not an adult, can mark one for more surveillance, more scrutiny. Yet, who counts as an adult, or a juvenile or a child, is fluid and never innocent. While those who are fifteen can be culpable and accountable for crimes

as adults, the state protects that same age cohort through laws that stipulate that a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old is unable to consent to sexual acts, except in some states where a girl of said age may marry a man, with parental consent. Most states, including Illinois, require and sanction an abstinence-based sex-education curriculum because those in school are too young to be sexual, yet many courts do not hesitate when sentencing the same body to an adult prison or placing a ten-year-old on the sex offender registry.

Assessments about who has had enough time to grow-up are not neutral. While the total number of juveniles locked up over the last three decades continues to decline, African-American youth are still five times more likely than white youth to end up behind bars.<sup>-5</sup> Youth of colour are disproportionately more likely than white youth to be removed from their home, transferred to adult court, sent to adult prison, and more. Police and other disciplinary systems target non-heterosexual and non-gender conforming youth, and “consensual same-sex acts more often trigger punishments [from schools and courts] than equivalent opposite sex behaviours.” Non-heterosexual girls experience fifty percent more police stops and have twice the risk of arrest and convictions as heterosexual girls who engage in the same behaviour.<sup>-6</sup> The predominance of transwomen stopped in public places by police and accused of solicitation while engaged in routine activities, identified by many activists as “walking while trans,”<sup>-7</sup> is confirmed in Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (2011), which states that “twenty-nine percent of respondents reported police harassment or disrespect.”<sup>-8</sup>

Even for juveniles and children, the affiliated protections arrive with a sizeable cost. A child might merit access to rehabilitation within the criminal justice system or a shorter sentence in a prison that has education and other resources, and after release from prison, their record might be sealed. Yet the same categorical assumptions of diminished capacity that can potentially offer resources can also regulate and punish. Behaviour and mobility are constrained by laws that police juvenile’s rights: to drink alcohol, to smoke cigarettes, to assemble (loitering and curfew), to engage in sexual activities, to work, to travel, to sign a legal contract, to wear particular clothing,

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Annie E. Casey Foundation, “Reducing Youth Incarceration in the United States,” February 2013, [www.aecf.org/m/resource/doc/AECF-DataSnap-shotYouth-Incarceration-2013.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/m/resource/doc/AECF-DataSnap-shotYouth-Incarceration-2013.pdf).

6  
Kathryn Himmelstein and Hannah Brückner, “Criminal-Justice and School Sanctions Against NonHeterosexual Youth: A National Longitudinal Study,” Pediatrics 127, no. 1 (2011): 50.

7  
Kate Sosin, “Walking While Trans in Chicago,” Windy City Times, December 26, 2012, [www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Walking-while-trans-in-Chicago/40947.html](http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Walking-while-trans-in-Chicago/40947.html).

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Jamie Grant, Lisa Mottet, and Justin Tanis, Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, [www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/ntds\\_summary.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_summary.pdf).



to vote. Many agencies enforce and monitor the status of minors: parole and probation officers, youth and child welfare workers, truancy officers, school social workers. While many are denied childhood and are born adults—fully culpable and never innocent—being a young person is not always advantageous, as juveniles, non-adults, are unfree and require regulation.

### Learning Time

One could argue that the classroom in this prison, within an institution with no resources for intellectual or creative inquiry, is punishingly and beautifully unique. Prison rules limit class sizes to fifteen people per class, well under the number that most state colleges demand to run a course. While college and universities classes require payment in exchange for college credits, these classes currently do not garner formal academic credit and are not authorized by any state university. This denies students the right to receive external validation and formal recognition for learning, but this program is freed from all institutional regulations: no grades, no testing, no state imposed benchmarks, no rituals of producing curriculum for “employable skills,” and no requirement to have faculty with only the proper advanced degrees. Freedom from these requirements creates a different form of education and a damning paradox emerges: in a place flanked by armed guards in watchtowers, learning opportunities exist that are unavailable almost anywhere in the free world. Policy wonks and administrators suggest that the population at maximum security prison is expendable, never going to get out, not worth the educational investment, yet in this maximum-security prison aesthetics and education are possible for the too many poor people—particularly black, First Nations, and brown folks—often unwelcome in the ivory-towers.

### Life Time

[Figure 72, p 203]

This timeline details the artist’s life from birth to current

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incarceration. Each hour represents significant life events from getting shot to becoming a father. Time in school, having a family, looking for work, and being in prison are marked by hours on the clock.

## Multi-dimensional Time

In 1905, Albert Einstein seriously challenged existing notions of time. Years later, a fellow physicist, Alan Lightman, wrote a novel called Einstein's Dreams, a fictional account of the creative ideas that influenced the theory of relativity. In one of the dream chapters, Lightman describes the consequences of a world where time has multiple dimensions.<sup>9</sup> Existence hinges on each person's attitude toward the possibility of imagining and creating the future. Multi-dimensional time celebrates the notion that "another world is possible," but it also forces us to live in and among contradictory institutional structures that create brutal inequities.

Life is mapped by a set of (in)visible advantages and disadvantages that impact how time is spent. While dimensions always intersect, individual lives are shaped by the specifics of place and time. Multi-dimensional time acknowledges that the paths of our present and futures, for those in and outside prison, are not on a parallel course but are inextricably intertwined.

## Not This Time

The most prevalent responses I hear in organizing and scholarly contexts when abolition frameworks are introduced into a conversation about our prison nation are:

It's fine to keep dreaming, but we need something now.

Well, I'm not a utopian, I live in the real world.

Let's be practical, really, let's make this meeting achieve something.

I'm with you, but that will turn people off.

Sure, for women and non-violent offenders maybe, but what about the bad people?

These responses have and continue to be used in community meetings, campaign-planning sessions, email dialogues, question time at a range of public talks and conferences. Sometimes these narratives are so prevalent I find myself slipping into these scripts as well, asking, well... maybe...

The demand for visibility and power by those marginalized has often been met with questions about the feasibility of any radical demands for the redistribution of power: Abolitionists who sought to end slavery, feminists pushing for equal rights, queers seeking to decriminalize sodomy. All too often we hear: We can't go too far too fast, don't make yourself a target, we need to wait, we must move slowly, don't be too visible, don't make them angry, we can't ask for that right now . . . Liberation under oppression is somehow unthinkable, unimaginable by design.

Yet the admonition "to be practical" illuminates the value of an abolition framework. Making the claim that something is broken does not require that we know the response. As anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli writes, "Not this makes a difference even if it does not produce a prepositional otherwise."<sup>10</sup> Not this re-oriens the terrain and forces other imaginative possibilities. The fierceness of not this has the potential to even momentarily interrupt the daily grind, the everyday, business-as-usual forms of harm and state violence. While abolition, like other forms of critique, does not require a response—and a part of the power is in the interruption, the refusal of the wait, wait, slow death—many have used this interruption to create and build interventions across the carceral state. Organizations and people are building other ways to create stronger and safer communities that do not involve more prisons, more drone-surveilled borders, more police in our schools. Asking those harmed to wait, and to then wait more for ends that are inadequate, is characteristic of how our time is shaped by a punishing state.

## Out of Time

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Saidiya Hartman,  
Lose Your Mother  
(New York: Farrar,  
Straus and Giroux,  
2007), i.

Prisons are a plank in what historian Saidiya Hartman has termed the “afterlife of slavery” including “skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.”<sup>11</sup> Slavery, Black Codes, convict-lease systems, policing, and imprisonment are intertwined manifestations of state violence under white supremacy. Yet racialized state violence is a moving trajectory. While prison closures and police reforms are announced, anti-black racism, for example, persists and new state forms emerge to incubate and animate punishing logics.

In 2013, Illinois closed the Tamms supermax prison, the only maximum-security prison for people the state considers women, and two youth prisons. Across the U.S., many herald the “end of mass incarceration,” yet Hartman’s frame pushes us to keep our eyes on the prize. Even with no evidence that surveillance cameras and police in schools reduce violence or act as deterrents, districts are hiring more school police officers and installing more surveillance cameras in schools overflowing with poor black and brown youth. Mandatory minimum sentences for gun possession are offered as a viable solution to the on-going violence in Chicago’s poorest neighbourhoods. Drones are proposed to monitor the U.S.-Mexico border, a zone already flooded with military forces and vigilantes. A carceral logic still drives our public safety agenda. Public safety has been, and still is, law-and-order politics.

Stepping out of our time, away from narratives of progress, away from reform as advancement, forces us to unpack the jarring contradictions inherent in the political moment in which the United States elected a black president and incarcerates more people than any other nation on the globe.

## State Time

State time is a system exclusively tailored to the operation of the institution. It’s not your own time; it’s what’s given to you like your constitutional right. You have a right to exercise, eat, and shower. You know, so that’s state time. Anything other than that is nothing else

here. You know, so it's not no time... that's what state time is: twenty-three hours a day in a cell.

State time is time that doesn't belong to you even though God gave it to you. The state uses this time to manipulate you, to control you, to humiliate you. What does time here look like? I think time looks like a ghost because it's not there, it's not real. Even though you live it, it really doesn't exist in here. Everything seems to remain the same. Even me, I still look the same. It's somewhat preserved me, but yet it took my heart from me.

### Spending Time

When I get out of school, like when I leave from here, I go to my work assignment. And I have to have time, my time—things I want to do for the benefit of me, outside of state time. I guess that's another sense of state time—working. I clean the cells out; do all the dirty jobs; push brooms; gotta listen to a million different personalities a day; gotta be counsellor; gotta have counselling skills because everybody got problems... the inmates, and sometimes the officers. As I go past the cells, some inmates got some type of problems that maybe I can help with, maybe I can't. So, I spend a lot of time doing that—listening to people's problems. It's an advantage here because you want to be outside the cell as much as possible, because you have more freedom. A lot of guys are locked in their cells twenty-two hours a day, but you're out at least—you're out of the cell at least eight hours, so that's like free time and you have freedom to do certain things. I might have a friend that's located on a higher gallery and I might want to cook food with him. I can take the food from my cell and go up there, but if I'm in my cell, I have to cook with my celly. You might have a relative that's in the cell house with you and you spend more time with him. You can go to his cell and you can all talk on the phone together, but if I'm in my cell that means he got to call and then I have to call separately, but if I'm out I can talk with him. I have a cousin here, and his mother is my mother's twin so we're kind of close, and I get to see him a lot.

## Suspended Time

Time in prison: humans adapt to their environments to survive. To survive in prison, which is an abnormal environment, one must become somewhat abnormal. A testament to this unnatural milieu is the oxymoronic loneliness in a place of so many. A good word or two to describe the mental aspect here is “suspended animation” or “purgatory.” This is because every day is the same, and with the accumulation of similar days time is lost. So a short time becomes one long day or suspended animation.

Some of us try not to remember yesterday, and with nothing that stands out or sets that day apart from the other days, one can’t clearly remember it anyway. Some of us are stuck with nothing to look forward to tomorrow. So, without yesterday to remember and tomorrow to look forward to, then where are we? Purgatory—a state of mind where one lives through the times that once were, before incarceration. And, what aggravates this hampered mental progress is the inability to advance with the free world, i.e. technology, academic knowledge, and (experience of) events. Another example of suspended animation is the many adolescent adults here. Those who came to prison as a child or a teen, and then twenty years later, they’re still at their same level of intelligence. This is because they were not provided the tools to ascend into manhood and/or trust anyone here to be a template of a mature adult. This is what time feels like, looks like, and what people on the outside should know about time.

↓ Due Time, pp 183–195 ↓

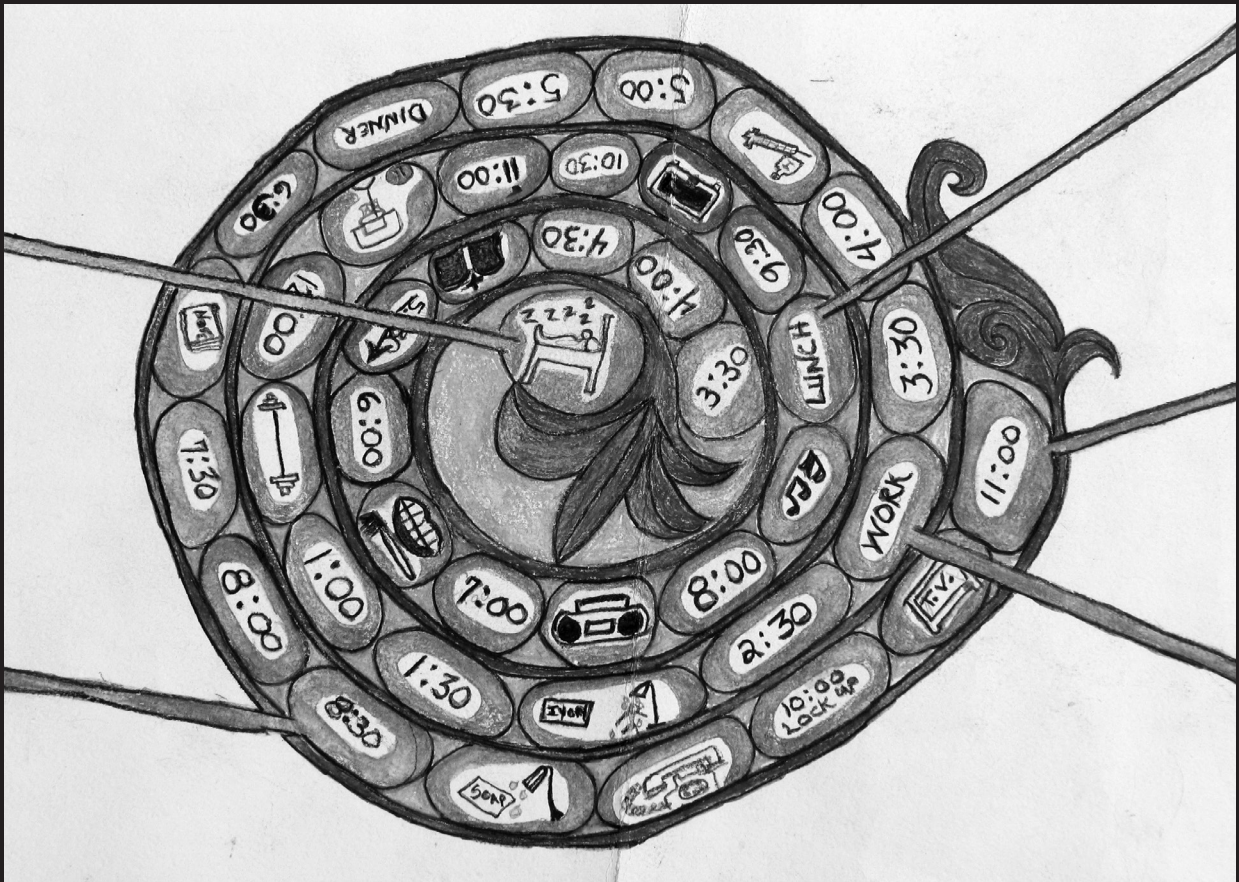


Figure 68: Day Time, Johnny Taylor. excerpt from "One Day, My Life at the Ville" colored pencil on paper. 24"x36"



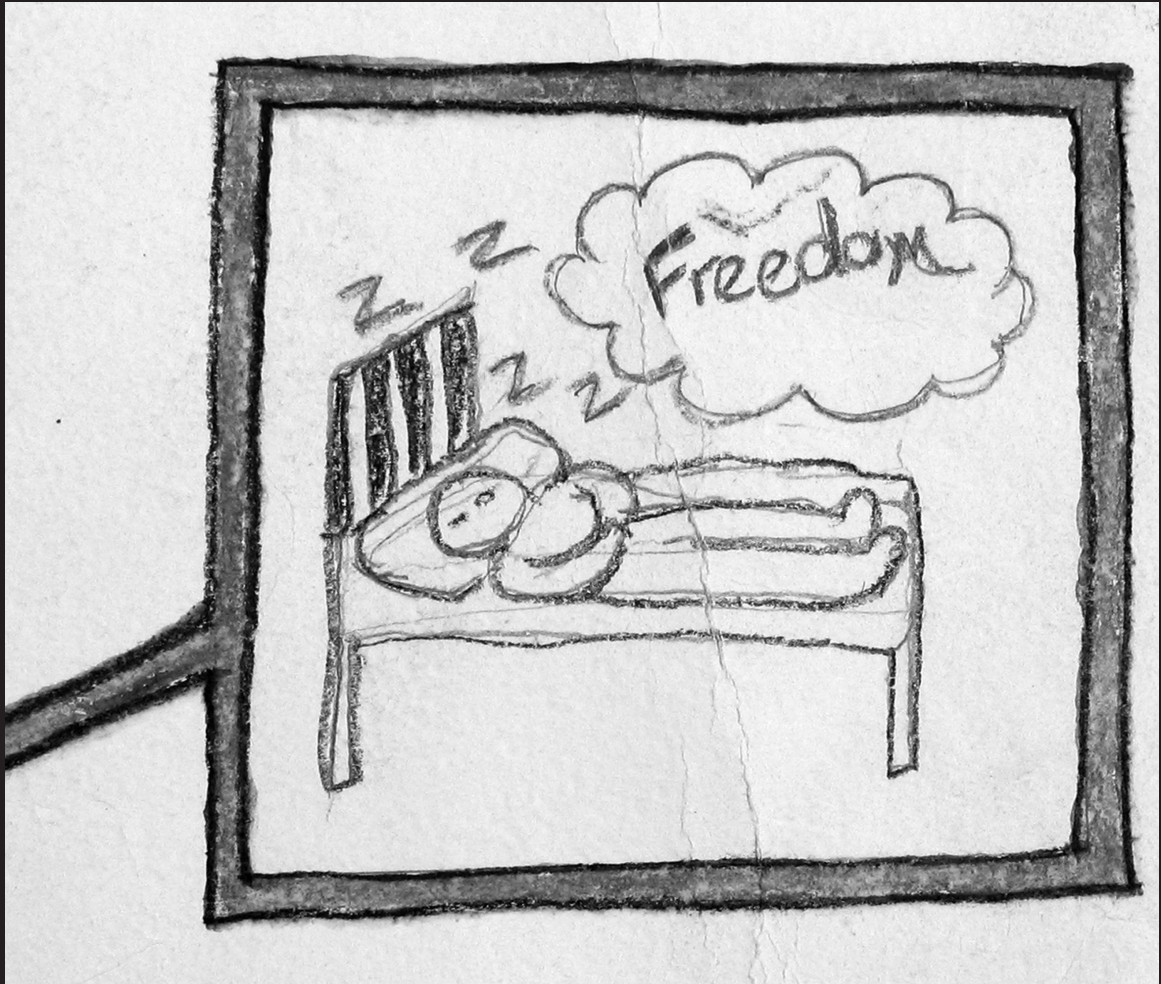


Figure 69: Day Time, Johnny Taylor. excerpt from "One Day, My Life at the Ville" colored pencil on paper. 24"x36"



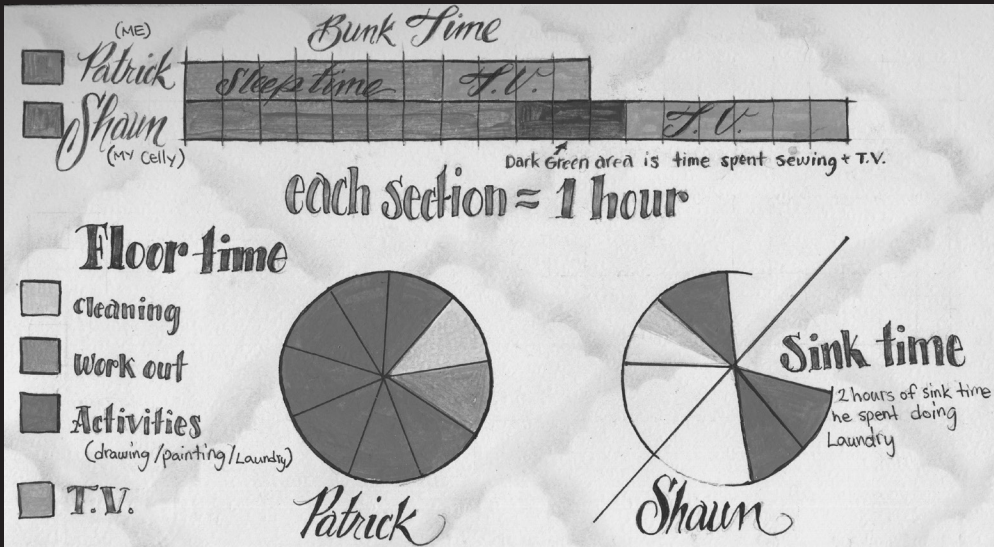


Figure 70: Floor Time, Patrick Betley. excerpt from timeline booklet, Untitled. 2013 acrylic and pen on paper. 22"x16".

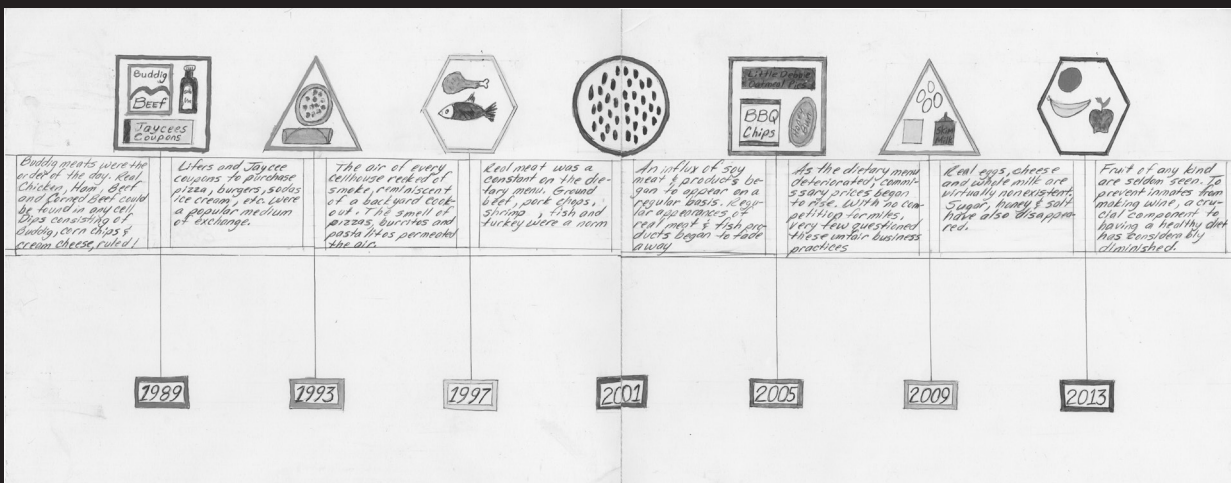


Figure 71: Food Time, George Frison. Untitled. 2013 acrylic and pencil on paper. 28" X 22"

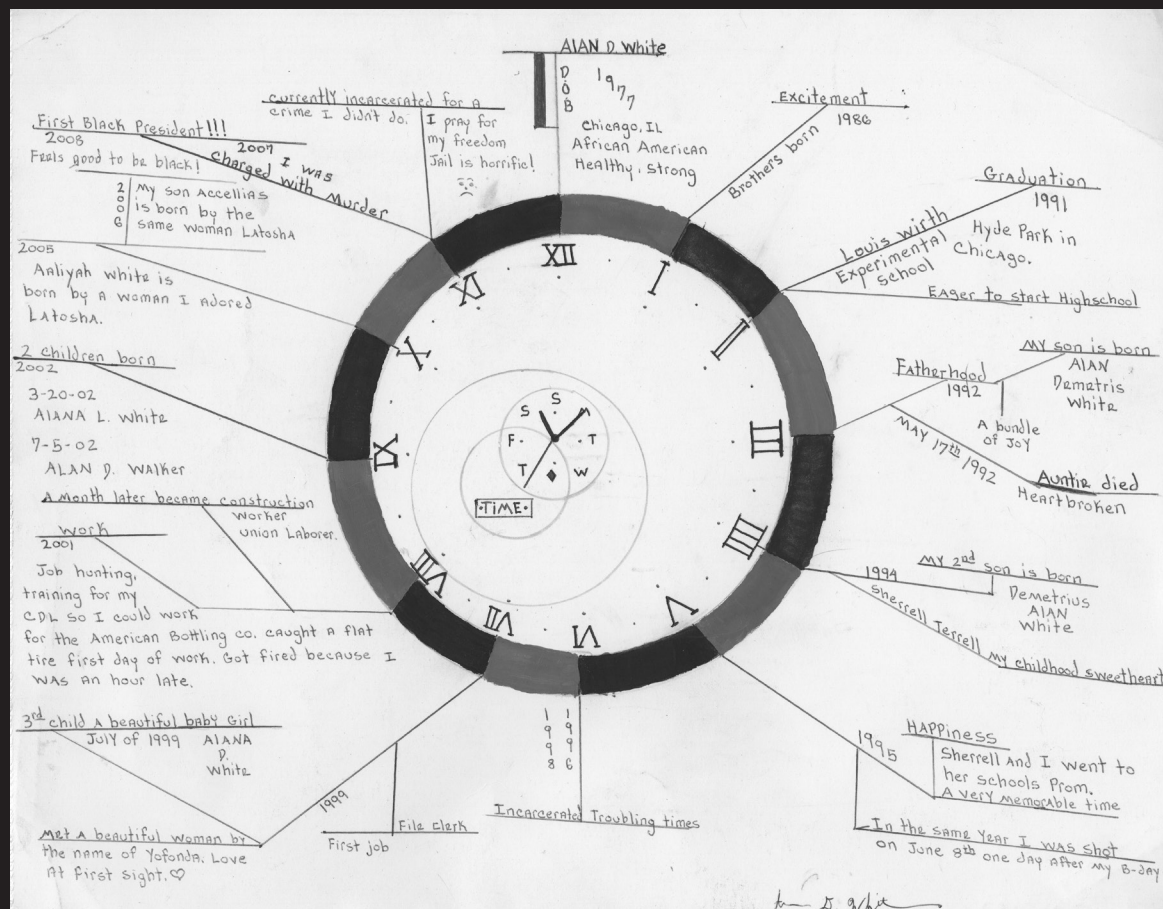


Figure 72: Life Time, Alan D. White. Untitled 2013. acrylic and pencil on paper 14"x24"