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The Gate of the Exonerated: Religious Rhetoric, Memory, and Restorative Justice

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My essay provides a rhetorical analysis of the 2022 public installation of the Gate of the Exonerated, an entrance to New York's Central Park that represents the city's remorse for the 1989 wrongful conviction of the teenagers known as the Central Park Five. The unveiling ceremony marked the twentieth anniversary of the five men's exoneration. In focusing on both the secular and sacred symbolism of the Gate, I argue the event functions as a religious, exculpatory-encomium honoring wrongly convicted people through the Burkean strategies of transvaluation and exorcism by misnomer. Such a rhetoric constitutes a public act of contrition, a collective, corrective commemoration, thereby demonstrating religious rhetoric's capacity to demand institutional accountability, admission of guilt, contrition, and vindication for social injustices.

Keywords: Gate of the Exonerated, Religious Rhetoric, Central Park Five, Memory, Restorative Justice

In Plato's *Gorgias*, at the climatic point in the exchange between Socrates and Polus on whether it is worse to do wrong than to suffer wrong, a claim that after Socrates' dialectical beat down, Polus ultimately assents. Socrates avows that one who is justly punished suffers the good and is thereby liberated from the great evil of the soul. Moreover, one who inflicts wrong and receives proper punishment therefore liberates his soul from evil in a way that one who inflicts wrong and escapes punishment cannot. Moving then to the nature of rhetoric's just and unjust purposes, Socrates asserts:

> Then for pleading in defense of injustice, whether it is oneself or one's parents or friends or children or country that has done wrong, rhetoric is of no use to us at all. Polus expect one were to suppose, perchance, to the contrary, that a man ought to accuse himself first of all, and in the second place his relations or anyone else of his friends who many from time to time be guilty of wrong; and instead of concealing the iniquity, bring it to light in order that he may pay the penalty and be made healthy; and, moreover, to compel both himself and his neighbors not to cower away but to submit with closed eyes and good courage, as it were, to the cutting and burning of the surgeon, in pursuit of what is good and fair, and without reckoning in the smart: If his crimes deserve a flogging, he must submit to the rod, if fetters, to their grip; if a fine, to its

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> payment; if banishment, to be banished; or if death, to die: himself to be the first accuser either of himself or of his relations, and to employ his rhetoric for the purpose of exposing their iniquities that they may be relieved of that greatest evil, injustice.[1]

While rhetoricians who go to Plato for insights on rhetorical themes and conceptualizations are in danger of being resented by their colleagues, I find the aforementioned exchange to be compelling for exploring how rhetoric may serve as a civic roborant.

Hitherto this moment, rhetoric has been cynically characterized as cookery, flattery, a phantom branch of statesmanship, with nothing noble about it. But here Plato seems to express an acceptable purpose of rhetoric with the unique functions of righting wrongs, promoting reconciliation, holding individuals and polities accountable for transgressions, and thereby provides a vision of what today we might call restorative justice. In an explanatory note, Robin Waterfield observes, in order to make Plato's paradoxical point that rhetoric should only be used to denounce one's own, or one's city or country's crimes, Socrates also ignore perfectly moral uses such as defending an innocent person who has been wrongly accused of a crime.[2] Yet, when that kind of forensic rhetoric fails or judicial processes are corrupted by systemic racism and internal bias, as was with the well-known case of "The Central Park Five" and so many other wrongfully convicted people, this former, unique brand of restorative and reconciliatory rhetoric must be enacted to save us from the worst of all human conditions, injustice.

In this essay I contend that what Plato delineates here is a form of religious rhetoric that performs a public act of contrition, entreats atonement for subreption and misprision, and liberates both the falsely accused and the institution meting out fallacious punishment from this greatest evil. I want to read the recent 2022 public installation of the Gate of the Exonerated, an entrance to New York's Central Park that represents the city's remorse for the 1989 wrongful conviction of the teenagers known as "The Central Park Five" as an application and instantiation of commemorative and restorative rhetoric. The unveiling and dedication ceremony on December 19, 2022, marked the twentieth anniversary of the five men's exoneration. Through a Burkean nuanced analysis conjoined with work on the hermeneutics of place and memory, I argue the Gate of the Exonerated functions as a religious, exculpatory-encomium, synecdochically honoring all wrongly convicted people, freeing a city from an egregious transgression, and finding its telos in a concrete act of restorative justice. Dave Tell, writing about synecdoche, argues that synecdoche reduces discourse (including visual discourse) from a scarcity of symbolic density. "It is synecdochic conversion upwards that 'induces' an audience to overcome the limitation of language."[3] Given the Gate of the Exonerated's spatial and hermeneutic ambiguity, Tell's characterization of synecdoche's rhetorical dynamism is an apt application of the Gate's discursive capacity as various audiences encounter and are move by it.

Background: The Central Park Five

The Black and Latino men, known as the Central Park Five, who were falsely prosecuted for the rape of a jogger in 1989 were exonerated in 2002 after spending years in prison for a crime they did not commit. In December of 2022, in conjunction with the twentieth anniversary of the Central

[1] Plato, *Gorgias*. translated by Robin Waterfield, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 469b.
[2] Plato, *Gorgias*, 481b.
[3] David Tell, "Burke's Encounter with Ransom: Rhetoric and Epistemology in 'Four Master Tropes,'" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 34 (2004), 43.

Park Five's rightful acquittal, the Central Park Conservancy and the Public Design Commission of New York officially dedicated the Gate of the Exonerated, which will be at the entrance on 110th Street between Fifth Avenue and Malcolm X Boulevard. And according to the *Washington Post*, offers an opportunity to examine how a history of racism in the outdoors has affected Black people and other people of color, not only in New York City parks, but across the United States. Since at least the 19th century, White authorities have attempted to remove and exclude Black people from park landscapes. Central Park designer Frederick Law Olmsted envisioned the space as a democratic refuge for all New Yorkers that would foster "a sense of enlarged freedom" and provide a place to escape the challenges of urban life."[4] Zachary Small of the *New York Times* characterized the *rasion d'etre* and the Gate as "a rare instance of a municipality formally memorializing its colossal mistake, acknowledging the error in sandstone, etched onto the wall at the point where the teenagers entered the park that evening."[5] Mayor Eric Adam's extolled the designation of the gate as a "lasting reminder of the grave miscarriage of justice that took place." Art historian Michael Bogart described the Gate of the Exonerated as "a self-flagellation at the official level." The "named" gate is the first to receive its own moniker since 1862. The Central Park Five's story of injustice has been inventively dramatized in the aesthetic forms of a 2012 documentary, "The Central Park Five," a Pulitzer prize-winning opera, and a 2019 Netflix mini-series, "When They See Us, which explored the malignant machinations that led to the tragic telos.

The Gate's Rhetorical, Political, Religious, and Public Observations and Applications

The Gate of the Exonerated provides not only a visual and spatial representation, filling that void of the ineffable, for a wholistic moral conversion of upward atonement, but also stands as a material testament to, as Burke wrote in his Dialectician's Hymn, "remake our habits." One of those habits is racist motivated eyewitness misidentification. According to University of Michigan School of Law's National Registry of Exonerations, forty-seven percent of all exonerations were related to eyewitness misidentification.[6] As a form of visual and spatial rhetoric, the Gate of the Exonerated constitutes a public act of contrition, a collective, corrective commemoration, thereby demonstrating religious rhetoric's capacity to demand institutional accountability, admit guilt, confess sins, and publicly ask for absolution for social and racial injustices. The Gate of the Exonerated thereby becomes a site of commemorative correction that liberates the soul of a polis from that great evil of inflicting wrong and escaping penance.

Political theorist Carl Schmitt concluded that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby for example the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver, but also because of their systematic structure."[7] But what happens when the omnipotent lawgiver is wrong, corrupt, or complicit in the social transgression? Is there no balm in Harlem?

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[4] Amanda Martin-Hardin, "Central Park's 'Gate of the Exoneration' invites reflection on racism in parks," *The Washington Post* 19 December, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/made-by-history/2022/12/19/central-parks-gate-exoneration-invites-reflection-racism-parks/

[5] Zachary Small, "Decades After the Central Park Jogger Attack, a City Marks its Mistake," *The New York Times* 12 December, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/12/arts/design/central-park-five-gate.html

[6] University of Michigan School of Law National Registry of Exonerations Annual Report, 12 April 2022, NRE Annual Report 2022.pdf (umich.edu).

[7] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology,* translated by George Schwab, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988, 22.

How do we as a polity atone for such mistakes that cannot be reversed? Kenneth Burke reminds us that the foundations of rhetoric's melioristic sites are always formed in the soil and the soiled to assoil; they are well equipped with homeopathic and hermeneutical medicine should we have the courage to activate them. Appropriating Milton's preamble to *Samson Agonistes* and reflecting on the genre of tragedy, Burke states, "for so, in physic, things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humors."[8] If sullied memory, and corrupted recall practices, and racial bias are the ignoble causes of wrongful convictions, then, following Burke's perspective, memorials and monuments to collective and restorative justice can serve as remedies for, and prevent future, injustice. In other words, in high profile cases like the Central Park Five, where the injustices were so egregious, the rhetoric of restorative justice requires not only a full restoration, compensation, and reparation individually, but also publicly. Ergo, a transcendent strategy, a conversion, a transvaluation, an exorcism, not to expunge public memory's ignominious record, but a full-scale effort to set it right must be enacted.

Moreover, the decision to erect the named gate at the very material site where the boys entered the park that fateful night, functions in Burke's words as a "sour against sour," thereby providing a homeopathic hermeneutic. By this I mean, a commemorative rhetoric seeking to achieve authentic reconciliation employs a portion of poison, dedicating a place evoking painful memories for victims of injustice, but with the intention to use such memories as a curative reinterpretation aiming to make straight a crooked path of neglect and monumental injustice. Such a hermeneutic perspective follows that of Janet Donahoe who recognizes a horizonal view of place and subject whereby both are "mutually accommodating; as place changes, self-changes, and memory changes."[9] Concomitantly, as John H. Saunders observes, sites of public memorial "engage in a curated version of the past within a present moment for future contemplation."[10] Our American polity's prototypical aesthetic and commemorative responses to exigencies of social and racial injustice have been wall murals and makeshift memorials fashioned by individual families and friends. I think about the makeshift memorials that appeared in Minneapolis after the murder of Geroge Floyd. All the more uncommon are instances when civic polities invest in abiding symbolism and public space to atone for injustices. Seizing the karotic and rhetorical spirit of commemoration, on December 19, 2022, precisely twenty years ago to the day in which the convictions of Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana, Korey Wise, and Yusef Salaam (known as the Central Park Five) were vacated, a newly named Central Park gate was unveiled. "The Gate of the Exonerated," the first named gate since 1862, and according to the Central Park Conservatory is intended to shed light on prejudice and wrongful incarcerations that are products of systemic inequities in the justice system and honor all who have been wrongfully convicted. Collaborating partner the Manhattan Community board 10, a volunteer organization that represents Central Harlem in New York City, conceptualized the vision of the gate as "a permanent commemoration to the fortitude and resiliency of the exonerated men and to the need for social justice reform."[11] Such testimony provides an interpretive rationale for the Gate's purpose.

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[8] Kenneth Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action,* 3rd ed. (Berkely: University of California Press, 1973), 65.

[9] Janet Donahoe, *Remembering Places: A Phenomenological Study of the Relationship Between Memory and Place (Toposophia: Thinking Place/Making Space)*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), xvii.

[10] John H. Saunders, "The Pulse of Public Memory," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 12, no. 3 (2022): 114.

[11] Central Park Conservancy, "Gate of the Exonerated," 31 January 2023. https://centralparknyc,org/gate-fo-the-exonerated.

The Exigence of Wrongful Convictions

It seems almost daily we hear news stories about men (typically persons of color) who have been released from prison after being incarcerated decades for crimes they did not commit. Most recently, Sheldon Thomas of New York and Kevin Dugar of Chicago have come to mind. According to the Innocence Project exoneration data, in fifty eight percent of all wrongful convictions, the convicted person is Black. Furthermore, according to the National Registry of Exonerations, at least 450 non-DNA-based exonerations involve eyewitness misidentification.[12]

The culprit in most of these eyewitness misidentification cases is language and memory. Human memory is fragile and fugacious. Memories are always already inchoate, incomplete, and imperfect. Retention of our perceptions of events deteriorates over time and can become contaminated, leading to distortions and alterations when attempting to recall them. Moreover, improper training of law enforcement and biased linguistic framing when conducting "line ups." Clearly these all too familiar "miscarriages of justice" are profound ethical exigencies. When these miscarriages are rectified, brought to full term though appeals, DNA testing, new trials, etc. and justice is finally restored through exoneration and freedom, what becomes of those responsible for meting out such injustices? There is a dearth of fitting rhetorical responses, correctives, or broader civic acts of contrition. This scarcity of restorative rhetoric and public exoneration only perpetuates injustices. Our nation has a long history of redemptive violence and vindication (just watch any Western or Quintin Tarantino film). Public executions and lynchings were very real, visual, violent, and traumatic spectacles in America. What we as a nation witness far less are public exonerations and events that commemorate contrition, rectitude, and restorative justice. America does seem to observe flash points of social injustice with impromptu, make-shift memorials assembled by family and friends. However, it is far more sui generis when a government entity demarcates the permanence of a public space for the purpose of memorializing their own prodigious transgression.

Restoration via Transvaluation

In *Attitudes Towards History*, Burke states that 'prayers can be extremely accurate, just as they can be inaccurate"[13] An act of restorative justice that seeks to dedicate a space and place of disgrace can only be commemorated by an accurate naming through a corrective speech act. The commuting of wrongful sentences is commemorated by communicating with rightful sentences, an honorable syntax purifies the dishonorable acts of sin. In the case of the Gate of the Exonerated, the process of transvaluation or restorative conversion is needed to exorcise injustice through the enactment of exoneration. The lesser known, but highly relevant, Burkean concept of transvaluation plays a critical role in redemptive dramas and social orders. In *Attitudes Towards History*, Burke defines transvaluations as "new attitudes" and remarks that attitudes are synonymous with values.[14] Applying this to the Gates of the Exonerated, the words of William James resound, "monuments are not about history; they are values made visible."[15] In *Permanence and Change*, Burke characterizes the process of transvaluation "whereby the signs of poverty were reinterpreted as the signs of wealth, the signs of hunger as the signs of fullness, and present weeping was characterized

[12] NRE Annual Report 2022.
[13] Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Towards History*, 3rd ed. (Berkely: University of California Press, 1984), 324.
[14] Burke, *Attitudes Towards History*, 381-382.
[15] William James, "Orations," *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1982), 73.

unmistakably as the first symptom of subsequent delight."[16] One rhetorical goal of transvaluation is the conversion of attitudes and orders. Sacrifices, self-inflicted or otherwise, are performative rituals enacted for transformative purposes. Virgins are sacrificed to end droughts; baptisms (the symbolic death to self) are conducted to remove original sin. But how are we as a nation to come to terms with the wrongful conviction, loss of innocence, and abuses of the justice system inflicted upon the Central Park Five, especially when the boys were victims of what Burke calls "the ultimate disease of cooperation?"[17]

Applying the Burkean conception of transvaluation to the rhetoric of Gate dedication ceremony in which three of the five men, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana, and Yusef Salaam attended (the other two men name them—could not bring themselves to return to such a site and declined to attend the ceremony) the audience bore witness to a monumental metonymy. But this was no mere reductive substitutionary association. No, it was a conversionary speech act, recall metonymy is Greek for "name changer," a prayerful and profound *transnominatio* was effectuated whereby the antecedent ignominious "Central Park Five" was exorcised and the newly liberated appellation the "Exonerated Five," was bestowed upon them and they were given a new name. As Isaiah 56: 5 states, "To them I will give in My house and within my walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters, I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off."[18] Burke refers to such a semantic shift in the spiritual terms of "exorcism by misnomer," a "casting out of devils by misnaming them."[19] However, in this particular case, like the example Burke uses, calling a terrifying monster in a child's bedroom what it is really is, a coat on a chair, one is not really misnaming it but exorcising by truth, bestowing a befitting moniker, resulting in a corrective conversion.

Such a prayerful speech act is emblematic of a Platonic rhetoric that seeks restorative justice, by casting out the demons of injustice. This only commences with calling things as they truly are. And while the loss of innocence and the time spent in prison cannot be changed, restorative justice is predicated on changing the things that should and can be changed. In this sense, the Gate of the Exonerate is a public form of the Serenity Prayer and through Burkean transvaluation also performs a new identity prayer, whereby just as Burke's Dialectican's Hymn sings "speak to thy Creation with more justice…until our naming gives voice correctly and how things are and how we say things are Are one."[20] Burke's Hymn speaks to the logological and theological promise of restorative justice that I have been advocating for throughout this essay.

Moreover, this transvaluation was aesthetically animated visually and spatially by the microphysics of the gate itself. The engraved sandstone wall of the gate, where the words "Gate of the Exonerated" indelibly reads, was born out of a "Harlem story" and is located on 110th Street between Malcolm X Boulevard and Fifth Avenue adjacent to the neighborhood where the Exonerated Five once lived. The gate opening delineates the precise node where the boys entered the park that evening. Moreover, the gate functions as a material rhetoric, discursively activating the spatial collective memory of the past and celebrating the metanoia of the present. Passing through the open gate frees the Exonerated Five from an unjust closure of confinement, corruption, and narrative control of their lives. While the memorial can never change the pain incurred by such a miscarriage of justice, will never fully restore years stolen by the five's incarceration, and does not

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[16] Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 3rd ed. (Berkely: University of California Press, 1984), 155.
[17] Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, (Berkely: University of California Press, 1969), 22.
[18] Good News Bible: Catholic Study Edition. 1979. New York: Sadlier.
[19] Kenneth Burke, *Perm and Change*, 133.
[20] Kenneth Burke, *Philosophy of Literary* Form, 448-449.

tell the whole story, it does offer a visible pledge of atonement, a marker of immorality corrected, and the hope of new life.

Collective Memory and the Hermeneutics of Rhetorical Restoration

As Ed Casey writes in *Remembering*, "place is selective for memories: that is to say, a given place will invite certain memories while discouraging others."[21] Recall the impact that a single experience in a specific place can have on one's memory. As Harlem Renaissance poet, Countee Cullen expressed in his poem: Incident:

> Once riding in old Baltimore,
> Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
> I saw a Baltimorean
> Keep looking straight at me.
>
> Now I was eight and very small,
> And he was no whit bigger,
> And so I smiled, but he poked out
> His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."
>
> I saw the whole of Baltimore
> From May until December;
> Of all the things that happened there
> That's all that I remember.[22]

Memory is powerfully subjective. However, the rhetorical goal of restorative justice through collective remembering is not to change memory, but to acknowledge victims' pain, loss, and suffering, and to alter the behavior responsible for such injustices. The Gate of the Exonerated, I argue can be interpreted as a site of religious contrition and hermeneutical restoration. Literary critic William Gass observes, "more than a marker, a monument literally stands for something; it speaks to a community, a city, a state, but monumentality as a quality which only a few objects…possess, exceeds speech. It moves to make and solidify the society it addresses actually drawing toward and taking into itself a public which its significance then shapes."[23] If the Gate of the Exonerated speaks to the community, the city, and the nation, what then does it say? And while the hermeneutics of the park entrance possess a painful, subjective memory for the Central Park Five, two of whom declined to even return for the commemoration ceremony to this point of no return, the rhetorical aim is one of intersubjective remembrance that disrupts forgetting the miscarriage of justice that took place here. The Gate quiet literally concretizes the city's remorse and promotes an ontology of ownership for its civic sins, with the eternal hope of freedom from any further injustice. It is impossible to begin "tabula rasa" since memory and history are written into the landscape itself, the Gate functions as a palimpsest preserving and distending memory and

[21] Edward Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological* Study, Bloomington: Indianan University Press, 2000, 189.
[22] Cite Cullen
[23] William Gass, "Monumentality/Mentality" *Oppositions* 25 (1982): 133.

understanding, seeking to transmute a subjective space of racist scapegoating and loss of innocence into a collective place of restorative justice and a commitment to end wrongful convictions.[24]

Places of tragic loss are markers of mourning, and while the memorial Gate does not demarcate the occasion of physical death like other memorials, a profound loss of innocence, a loss of personal freedom, an erosion of trust in democracy and civil institutions that were sworn to protect the most vulnerable can all be equated to a kind of death encapsulated in the far too oft uttered phrase, "a miscarriage of justice." Commemorating such loss is in fact part of the monumentality of the Gate, but also a collective admonishment for those who are responsible, those who remain and must, like the Latin root *monere,* to "remind" suggests, we be mindful and take to heart and practices the signification of the Gate so as to prevent the same kind of thing from ever happening again.

The Gate of the Exonerated functions as an epistemic site and a public act of witness to counter racism and injustice endemic to sedimented mythologies, single narratives, and monologic and myopic memories. But we might well ask, who is the Gate really for? Its purpose is to celebrate exoneration, but also mourn a miscarriage of justice. But it is also a gate of no return for the five men; no return to the past, no return to childhood, no return to innocence, thus, the commemoration rite, formally underscores loss and the ports of no return prescriptively performing what W.B. Butler Yeats wrote in his poem *The Second Coming,* "the ceremony of innocence is drowned."[25]

According to William Gass, monuments speak a kind of authenticity, they must disrupt and call into question the penchant that most viewers have for easy answers. For instance, two moral questions, both perplexing and provoking, can be asked. Can a monument be both selfless and self-serving? Would the Gate of the Exonerated have ever been erected if it did not provide reconciliation for the city's sins? The central rhetorical and religious purpose of The Gate of the Exonerated is to collectively stand in this present place that, as Janet Donohoe writes "characterizes a past in a peculiar way that prevents the past from being strictly the past, making it instead a kind of reflection on the present."[26] But beyond present reflection, a monument acknowledging injustice and the loss of innocence corporally and legally must also provide a common teleological hope and serve as Andre LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur observe to instantiate "the perpetual futurity of Redemption."[27] The Gate of the Exonerated acts, not only as a baptismal font, whereby a city's sins of the past were washed away, and an entry to a pastoral and recreational escape from the city, but also religiously as a sacred shrine where pilgrims can empathetically feel the public memory elicited from a site of shame.

Conclusion:

In Albert Camus' 1956 novel *The Fall,* he introduces the existential concept of relinquished freedom,[28] the principle of normalizing the suffering imposed on people living in a world without truth, fettered by categorical guilt and the impossibility of innocence. For Camus religion was not to be trusted because human existence cannot be derived from dependence on any external cause

[24] For more on commemoration transvalued or reconfigured, see Dave Tell, *Remembering Emmett Till* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 29-32.
[25] William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming, accessed 14, June 2024.
[26] Janet Donohoe, *Remembering Places*, 2014, 86.
[27] Andre LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 67.
[28]Albert Camus, *The Fall* translated by Justin O'Brien, New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

or systems. According to Camus, faith imprisons one to the beliefs and moral codes of others; religion removed the obligation to seek justice in the here and now. More recently, in his critically acclaimed *Between the World and Me*, Coates writes, "In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body, it is heritage."[29] Given America's heritage of racism and false imprisonment, in the case of the Central Park Five, we could substitute "body" for "boy" in the aforementioned quote of Coates.

Both of these axioms raise serious questions about the virtue of human living, being, and justice. Is injustice a reality and innocence an impossibility for America's citizens of color? How do we militate against the all too often odious offenses in our criminal justice system surfacing as symptomatic of broader pathologies, vestiges of a bloody violent heritage that Coates speaks of which promulgates existential appeals to tradition fallacies amplified by white indifference? As a religious rhetoric of restorative justice, I would argue the Gate of the Exonerate speaks against Camus' detached individualistic self-determinism and provides a much needed attempt to come to terms with, to repent, reconcile, and embody a conversion of heart and history not abdicated freedom, but a commitment to work for justice and freedom from collective, civic sins. The Gate of the Exonerated is a metanoia inspired monument that aims to rectify this lugubrious legacy of erroneous lock up. Each time one ingresses and egresses through the Gate of the Exonerated it should activate in them a positive disruptive, detotalizing moment of where they feel mortification and a materially manifested mea cupla and a public assertion that justice matters. May it convict them to work to free the wrongly convicted and through this visual and rhetorical edifice feel innocence lost, innocence denied, and future innocence that needs to be protected. Living in a democracy means listening. Living in a democracy means being wrong. Living in a democracy and a so-called Christian nation means atoning for and righting wrongs. A mature religious rhetoric involves evolving ourselves and letting ourselves and our communities be changed by a mysterious encounter with grace, mercy, and forgiveness. This is the truth that will set us free.

[29] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, New York: Random House, 2015, 111.