

## Captive State Poem by Mona Lisa Saloy

I.

Louisiana, my beloved Louisiana  
Boot on the Gulf  
Culinary heavenly seasons of mudbugs to  
*Cawain* to Okra for all who live & visit  
Our geography bound by beautiful bayous  
Where alligators roam and possums hide,  
Peep and reappear their beady eyes  
House sparrows squeal, Goldfinches holler,  
Cardinals carry babes, Louisiana's beautiful birds  
Brown pelicans parade across blue skies  
Musical mysteries of Blues, Gospel, Jazz  
Embrace faces to smile, hearts to sing  
Louisiana where Cicadas serenade us by day  
Katydid scream us silly at night  
Misbelieves blossom in fall, and  
Black berries break juice along fences  
Festivals of chicken, Gumbo, Strawberries dance  
Up and down each Parish for feasts and play

Black Creoles say, for everyone  
Time is marked, no escape, like  
Enslavement,  
Many people stolen from their  
Mother/FatherLand  
Just disappeared, took,  
Never to return,  
Many died in route to  
Slave Castles  
Holding pens, cages laced with  
Blood of beaten limbs  
Menstrual blood of young women  
Haunting the walls, the  
Stench still smells these centuries later  
Like weight of descendants  
Dismissed, devalued, deemed unworthy  
So many drowned in Middle Passage Storms, such  
Storms still haunt and rage in Atlantic seas

Yet these strong surviving men, women, stolen for their skills  
Congo gave Carpentry, they knew what woods did not rot  
Yoruba blessed Iron, the metal lace that adorns gates, galleries

Massai men herded Cattle  
Egyptians huddled horses; the Mali horsemen cultivated Black cowboys  
Denied, dismissed, their ways erased from his story

*Unless the lion speaks, the  
Hunter tells the tale<sup>1</sup>*

Even iron rusts, like  
The centuries of blame poured on Black backs  
It's no wonder our  
Brothers, some Fathers, some Cousins,  
Friends find no escape from the forced  
Cages that prison calls since enslavement, the  
Forced fury of continuing control post chattel life  
300 years, from Colonial to now convict leases

*Clouds pout, prisoners  
their pain pours like rain, these  
Hearts bleed for justice*

My people, my people, oh my people  
Forced to labor, framed into caged cells  
Their spirits crunched into brick boxes  
Their wills stripped of life choices  
Black prisoners bathe in prison injustice

Penitentiaries blossomed  
Angola rose to continue the call  
Incarcerate Blacks, continue forced labor  
Before 1972, parole was possible  
By 1979, LA state abolished parole  
Increased numbers of offenses mandating life sentences  
Life without parole  
Ordinary men behind brick walls  
Fenced for futile furry of enforcement  
Aging in prison  
Sentenced to die there

*Clouds pout, prisoners  
their pain pours like rain, these  
Hearts bleed for justice*

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<sup>1</sup> Akan proverb

United States blasts world rank 20<sup>th</sup> in  
Violent crime rates  
Global leader in imprisonment  
Louisiana, leads in incarceration rates  
Louisiana incarceration capital of Blacks  
Since enslavement stopped, 1863

*Clouds pout, prisoners  
their pain pours like rain, these  
Hearts bleed for justice*

II.

“Let me be your hand Lord”<sup>2</sup>

Chorus

Be my freedom, Lord I’ll (Be your hand!)  
Be my freedom, Lord I’ll (Be your hand!)  
Be my freedom, Lord I’ll (Be your hand!)  
Everyday’s a Sunday, dollar (in your hand)  
In your hand Lordy (in your hand!)  
Everyday’s a Sunday, dollar (In your hand)

Refain

Well, Lordy (Oh Lord, yeah!)  
Well, Lordy (Oh Lord, yeah!)

Verse 2

I’ll, stick to the promise, God, that (You made me!)  
I’ll, stick to the promise, God, that (You made me!)  
I’ll, stick to the promise, God, that (You made me!)  
Wasn’t gonna worship till I, (I go free!)  
I’ll go free, Lordy (I’ll go free!)  
Wasn’t gonna worship till I, (I go free!)

Refain

Well, Lordy (Oh Lord, yeah!)  
Well, Lordy (Oh Lord, yeah!)

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<sup>2</sup> Prison Blues and work song imagining what convicts may have wanted to sing, rather than what they were allowed to sing; the melody is borrowed from one captured during the WPA by Alan Lomax known as “Rosie”.

Verse 3

When we walks we bend and (Rock behind!)

When we walks we bend and (Rock behind!)

Wanna see tommorra worry (captive's mind)

Wanna see tommorra worry (captive's mind)

Refaïn

Well, Lordy (Oh Lord, yeah!)

Well, Lordy (Oh Lord, yeah!)

Refaïn

Well, Lordy (Oh Lord, yeah!)

Well, Lordy (Oh Lord, yeah!)