

CONTRIBUTOR

Thomas A. Green is Professor of Anthropology and Folklore, Affiliated Professor of Africana Studies, and Affiliated Professor of Religious Studies at Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA. Author of over three dozen works on the martial arts, his publications include *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia* [2001], *Martial Arts in the Modern World* [2003], *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation* [2010], 'Sick Hands and Sweet Moves' [2012], 'White Men Don't Flow: Embodied Aesthetics of the Fifty-two Handblocks' [2013], and 'I Am the Greatest Boxer: Articulating Group Identity Through Chinese Folk Drama', [2018]. His recent research focuses on Chinese and African-American vernacular martial culture.

THE 52 HAND BLOCKS, SEXUAL DOMINANCE, AND MOTHER DEAR AS ARCHETYPE

THOMAS A. GREEN

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ABSTRACT

The '52 Hand Blocks' is a fighting style associated with African-Americans and penal institutions in the United States. In the closing decades of the 20th century, interest in the '52s' was fanned by references in popular media. The debate over its real-world existence and origins spanned from African-descended folk arts to the ring strategies of professional boxers who learned to box while inmates in juvenile detention facilities. Inevitably, those searching for an origin sought to identify a founder and a direct lineage. In oral tradition, the leading candidate was Mother Dear, a predatory homosexual and inmate of the New York penal system who reportedly used the 52s to beat reluctant sexual partners into submission. According to legend, adepts learned the 52s while incarcerated, frequently after being raped by their mentors. Additional research reveals that the Mother Dear archetype was neither unique nor confined to the African-American community. In fact, substantially similar characters who combine physical strength, fighting ability, and homosexuality appear across the prison lore of the United States. This study explores the psychological and social functions of these figures, with particular emphasis on Mother Dear and his relationship to similar anti-heroes in African-American oral tradition.

The '52 Hand Blocks' is a vernacular African-American fighting style that is alleged to have originated in penal institutions in the United States. A variety of other styles exist along with the '52s', such as Stato and Comstock (both named after prisons in New York state), for example. The following comments use the umbrella term Jailhouse Rock for the various prison fighting styles. The term 52s refers to a specific variant of Jailhouse Rock, a variant that derives techniques from literally any source available, including boxing, Asian martial arts, folk styles of combat, and dance. This martial bricolage is characterized by strategies, rhythms, and attitudes based in the interplay of the destructive and the artistic [Green 2012].

Douglas Century describes the use of the 52s in a detention center fight in his book, *Street Kingdom*:

Kev took Peter Chaplain to school that day, put on a wicked exhibition of his fledgling fifty-two hand-blocks. [...] He was doing backhands, windmills, blocking the pervert's punches between two clenched forearms, kissing the useless fist and throwing it back at him like a pair of soiled drawers. And as he was tagging him up, shuffling, dancing backward, he started to taunt his beaten opponent.
[Century 1999: 77-79]

Significant elements of the 52s are seen in this passage, ones that appear repeatedly in informants' discussions: the signature forearm catch and kiss, characterization of the fight as an exhibition, taunting and humiliating the opponent; all mark the performance dimension of the style.

At the turn of the 21st century, during (primarily online) debates about the authenticity and even the existence of the system, speculation attempted to explain the meaning of the name '52 hand blocks'. Among the more convincing arguments was the one supported by Dennis Newsome and Douglas Century, among others: that the '52' references '52 Card Pick-up', the prank masquerading as a game in which the butt of the joke is invited to play the card game. In 52 Card Pick Up, upon acceptance, the trickster throws a deck of 52 cards into the air and challenges the victim to pick them up. The unstructured nature of the fallen cards' configuration, the need to respond to this random situation and the guileful mindset of the prankster all reflect elements of the fighting style.

Of greater relevance to the present analysis, however, are allegations by some informants that the 52s were associated with the 5% Nation of Islam, and that the name itself is rooted in their religious philosophy. The 5% Nation of Islam is also known as the Nation of Gods and Earths, due to the labeling of male followers as Gods and the female followers,

Earths. The religion was established by Clarence 13X (birth name, Clarence Smith), a former member of the Nation of Islam, sometime after 1963. Their teachings were encapsulated in a system of divine mathematics with attributes represented by combinations of numbers. According to Nation of Gods and Earths numerology ('Mathematics'), 5 (wisdom) plus 2 (power) equals 7; this in turn describes God (or perfection) [Swedenburg 1997]. The religion gained popularity among African-American inmates in the late twentieth century. The 52s were said to be a 'war tactic' used by the 5%ers to defend against the White supremacist gangs which were said to thrive in the prison context [Daniel Marks 2003, personal communication].

In the closing decades of the 20th century, interest in prison born systems was fanned by references to Jailhouse Rock in the popular media. The earliest of these saw print in 1974. A former inmate reported in an article published in *Black Belt* magazine that '[t]he different [New York state] prisons had and still have their own fighting styles' [Darling and Perryman 1974: 21]. In this article, poet and playwright Miguel Piñero, who was incarcerated repeatedly from the age of eleven, attested to the existence of fighting styles he had learned during his many prison terms and even demonstrated the Comstock cover. Piñero reported:

The first thing I did in the joint was to check out the style and learn to fight with a home piece – somebody from my neighborhood on the streets. I learned the Woodbourne shuffle, an evasion technique that first was used in the joint at Woodbourne and got passed around. Then I learned wall-fighting, and somebody taught me the Comstock style.
[Darling and Perryman 1974: 21]

Dennis Newsome, capoeira *mestre* (master) and Afrikanist researcher, generated interest in Jailhouse Rock through his work as fight choreographer for the Mel Gibson film, *Lethal Weapon* [Warner 1987]. A popular article about the film by Terry O'Neill briefly documented 'Jailhouse Rock' and featured Mel Gibson demonstrating moves learned from Newsome [O'Neill 1987].

In 1999, journalist Douglas Century published *Street Kingdom: Five Years Inside the Franklin Avenue Posse*, in which he depicted contemporary gangs, crime, and hip-hop culture in Brooklyn. In this book and in a 2001 article and photographs of practitioners in *Details* magazine, Century clearly documents the existence of a street variant of Jailhouse Rock known as the 52 Hand Blocks.

With the substantiation of the real-world existence of the 52s came a search for origins and originators. The quest for origins led from African-descended vernacular martial arts to the ring strategies of

professionals such as Floyd Patterson and Mike Tyson who learned to box while inmates in criminal detention facilities. Eventually, the search led to pursuit of a direct lineage, a founder. The leading candidate was Mother Dear, said to be a predatory Black homosexual and inmate of the New York penal system. According to this narrative, Mother Dear used the 52s to beat reluctant sexual partners into submission. Oral tradition further claimed that adepts learned the 52s while incarcerated, frequently after being raped by their mentors. Additional research reveals that the Mother Dear tale type is neither unique nor confined to the African-American community. In fact, substantially similar characters who combine physical strength, fighting ability, and homosexuality appear as Boxing Betty, Brutus, and similar figures across the prison lore of the United States [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]. Here, we are interested in what might be called the 'cultural message' of such figures, with particular emphasis on Mother Dear.

MOTHER DEAR

The following seven Mother Dear narratives, while part of a much larger corpus, are representative.¹

Legend 1

In my teens [in the 1980s] I use to hang out with a lot of 'Five Percenters' that was very good with 52 blocks. Many of these individuals was from Jamaica Queens [NY] that learn the style when they was in Rikersland [Rikers Island Prison] from this cat that was called Mother Dear. This brother Mother Dear I was told was gay, but he was a killer with the 52 blocks, because he was the individual that invented the style, a GAY GUY! From what I was told when a new jack [new convict] come, if Mother Dear like him, that new jack had to freely give it up, or get 'ROCK' THE HARD WAY [from 'get rocked': to take a beating] Not many cats from Brooklyn want to talk about these facts and truth about the true originator of the style that was a ass taker of this Jailhouse Rock style. Hahaha!

Legend 2

Also [...] a lot of '5 percenters' followed in Mother Dear's footsteps and starting knocking cats out in jail and taking they ass, using the 52 Blocks. But the best I heard of were 3 people. One was a brother named Tweety Love who was undefeated. He was known to walk [away] from any kind of fight without a scratch, one or many, and was shot to death because of the fact. The other 2 were known on Rikers Island. Here in NY. I believe this because

I got it from 2 separate sources and got bits and pieces from diverse people over a span of years. Believe it or not! It's on you. I'm just relaying what I got.

These 2 guys were brothers [Mother Dear and Mother Nature, according to a separate account] and they both were gay. Anyway, they were known for seeing someone they liked, and if you didn't submit to their approach, they beat you to submission. I'm not talking about raping a guy. I'm talking about the guy had to do them [assume the active rather than the passive role in a sexual encounter]. They were Flaming Gay, as close to being women as they could be. I don't know the end of their story, but I was told they were unbeatable and nobody messed with them.

Legend 3

Most older cats that been to jail and been in some shit on the streets will tell you that back in the days many of the brothers that learn the real 52 blocks got rock first, got they ass hit from behind by this big gay cat named Mother Dear. They never tell you that, because many back then had to keep playing the hardcore role, if brother on the outside knew that you got punk, raped, they knew that you get no respect. Soon a brother get free from jail and back in the streets of they urban community if found out they got punk [submitted to a homosexual relationship] that most likely got beat down bad, and god help you if you was a God [a male 5%er and therefore adamantly opposed to homosexuality]! Many in the hoods know this big gay cat named Mother Dear was the true originator of the 52 jailhouse fighting style. Many Gods use to tell me this cat Mother Dear was so nice [his style was at such a high level] with the 52 style that he could catch a person jab or punch and kiss [the puncher's fist] at the same time counterattack. The tale that been running around for years of Mother Dear down fall in the hoods of NYC, is a new jack terrified that Mother Dear was going to try and rape him [that he] bum rush [aggressive charge] Mother Dear out of fear while he was standing near a jail high balcony, and Mother Dear fall to his death!

Legend 4

An interesting story, a guy named Mother Dear on the east coast took out 9 inmates also using jail house rock, by himself. Now this is impressive supposedly because 9 guys is tough but 9 Jailhouse Rock guys is supposed to be impossible. But he did and his rep supposedly went as far as the west coast jails. A guy later on the street lasted 5 min with Mother Dear, and when he went into the joint he was like a legend just for lasting that long. So Mother Dear is like the Rickson Gracie of Jailhouse Rock lol.

1 Legends 1, 2, 4 and 7 are quoted from online message boards. Legends 3 and 5 are from email correspondence. Legend 6 is from a personal interview.

Legend 5

All my friends from that world were Five Percenters, but they all acknowledged the older men from the 60s and 70s as the masters, and none of them were Five Percenters. Mother Dear, Mother Nature, Dead-Arm Ro – all of those names come up and all of them are described as ‘faggots’ meaning that they were openly gay in prison, and certainly not members of the Nation or the Five Percenters.

Legend 6

I met with Brother King Saladean from Astoria Queen. This Brother was personally trained by Mother Dear. Also Walter Ali (Mother Dear’s prison name) was from Harlem. Now I don’t have his surname [birth name] but I was told that Ali was the name he used when he was locked up

Legend 7

Some on this site have speculated that Mother Dear was a myth, but I’ve met guys who claim to have been taught by him personally in prison: Duffy (real name Michael Duffy), and Rique Richards (Big K’s Panamanian-born older brother ‘Big Rique’). According to K, Mother Dear was tall, skinny and light skinned, with very, very long (yes, womanly) fingernails, which he would use viciously in his fights. (I confess, this remains URBAN LEGEND, but if enough diverse people – like Newsome out in San Diego – have heard the same names and stories, I tend to believe there is at least some historical basis in fact.)

The piecemeal biography of Mother Dear consists of what the academic discipline of Folklore terms ‘legends’. Legends, folklorists maintain, are truthful, or at least plausible, narratives that are set in the historical reality of the group, are not first-person accounts, and that focus on recurrent issues of the groups among whom they are transmitted. In many cases, legends are grounded in the biographies of genuine historical characters (e.g., American heroes, such as lawman Wyatt Earp and outlaw Jesse James) or events (the spread of Ch’an [Zen] Buddhism through China). Although legends often incorporate extraordinary events, group members consider these occurrences not only plausible, but true. As such they constitute a folk history of the group.

Folk history exists more to persuade than to document. Therefore, events and personalities are sometimes, while not simply fictitious, ‘fictionalized’. Certain elements of the narrative are massaged, manipulated or reconstructed, even in the face of quantifiable evidence to the contrary. This nudging of the facts represents an effort to legitimize the priorities and point-of-view of the speaker [Ben-Amos 1997: 809]. One must ask of the data, therefore, not questions related to the veracity of folk

biography, but of what issues drive the narratives surrounding Mother Dear. What are the agendas of the folk group?

In the case under consideration, fear of rape is a universal source of anxiety among members of prison populations [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]. Rape lore commonly involves victimization by means of superior physical strength and fighting ability wielded by a homosexual predator. Figures such as Mother Dear exemplify this combination of traits. Throughout the body of narratives surrounding Mother Dear as the 52s master, one finds references to the following relevant traits:

Invincibility

In the passages above: Legend 1 characterizes Mother Dear as a killer; 2 as ‘unbeatable’, and 3 deals with his invincibility in its entirety.

Viciousness

Legend 1 says ‘when a new jack [new convict] come, if Mother Dear like him, that new jack had to freely give it up, or get ‘ROCK’ THE HARD WAY’.

2: ‘These 2 guys [Mother Dear and Mother Nature] were brothers and they both were gay. [...] if you didn’t submit to their approach, they beat you to submission. I’m not talking about raping a guy. I’m talking about the guy had to do [sodomize] them.

7: ‘According to Kev, Mother Dear was tall, skinny and light skinned, with very, very long (yes, womanly) fingernails, which he would use viciously in his fights’.

Predatory

Legend 2: ‘a lot of “5 percenters” followed in Mother Dear’s footsteps and starting knocking cats out in jail and taking they ass, using the 52 Blocks’.

The label Mother Dear applied to such a character has an ironic impact that is deepened when the conventional usage of Mother Dear (also sometimes shortened to ‘Mu’ Dear’, or ‘Madea’) in African-American tradition is juxtaposed to the vicious predatory alleged founder of the 52s. The former came to general attention in the comic persona ‘Madea’ developed by American comedian Tyler Perry over a series of films. Perry asks:

But who is Madea and where did this character come from? Well, Madea isn’t an unfamiliar term in the black community in the south. Madea is a cross between two words, Mother, and Dearest. It’s particularly a southern term for grandmother. [Thomas 2005]

The Mother Dear of Southern tradition stands in diametric opposition to Perry's gun toting, pot smoking, violent character and the gay Mother Dear.

The term *Madea* once stood for the strongest matriarchal figure in a Black family. *Madea* is a wife who rarely cusses and has a gentle touch. But she rules as a firm disciplinarian. Her stare can get a child under control and make a grown man weep.

[Sellers, Jr. 2005]

SIMILAR FIGURES

When initiating the research on which this article is based, I believed that the case of Mother Dear and similar figures (e.g. Dead Arm Ro') was unique to 52s/Jailhouse Rock. Subsequently, however, I discovered the following narratives unrelated to the 52s.

Boxing Betty, Legend 1

Boxing Betty could have taught men a thing or two. 'Boxing Betty' was one of the best fighters Don King ever saw. The promoter met her while she was in jail for manslaughter in the 1960s. 'She could have been a world champ', King recalled during his visit to South Africa. He had one particularly amusing tale about Betty, who fought in prison competitions. 'Betty, whose pimp was half her size, was once approached in an ungentlemanly manner by a fellow inmate. So Boxing Betty warned him: 'Do you want me to slip out of my womanhood and into my [at this point the transgender woman's voice dropped from near-soprano to baritone] manhood and kick your ass?' [Queer Day 2004]

Boxing Betty, Legend 2

Boxing Betty was a regular old dude, four dudes raped him in the shower at old [OTHER STATE PRISON] before they tore it down so he worked out and started lifting weights and came back five years later and raped and beat them up every single one of them, he got his get back, I was nine when this happened. He's gay now, but he made them suck his dick; he's considered a legend, he's a cool person you would never know. [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]

Boxing Betty, Legend 3

We used to have this one legend that this guy called Boxing Betty, a homo well-known. He used to box when they had the boxing program. He liked taking it both ways, and if he seen someone he liked that he wanted sex with, he'd beat them up and force them to fuck him in the ass. [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]

Fort Knox

Got a big old dude down there who called Fort Knox, got real old been on state 28 or 29 years, real big dude, was a professional weightlifter or something, the thing is, he the girl, he'll beat somebody up that he might like and while you laying there knocked out he going to get what he want. He's pressing 300lbs but he like to suck your dick. If you don't let him, he knock you out and suck you. You wake up and your pants on down around your knees and you got a big old knot on your head. [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]

Brutus

There's this guy named Brutus; he's a really big guy supposed to be gay. He walked around with a weight belt on and told people 'hey, you let me suck you off or I'm going to knock you out, and then he'd do it'. I met Brutus in 1990. He was a big guy. [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]

Lick 'em Lenny

There's this guy they call Lick'em Lenny; he's what they call a goop gobbler. He'll knock them out and then take them [have sex with them]. I don't know the guy's name, that's his nickname, but apparently he's a known homosexual who likes young boys and will suck dick on these young guys. He's some weirdo; he pays for cups of semen and will drink them. [Fleisher and Kleinert]

THE UNIQUENESS OF MOTHER DEAR

The central figures in the preceding legends share important similarities. Each is a homosexual convict who used violence (although not as exotic as Mother Dear's 52s) to coerce sexual partners. Fort Knox, Lick'em Lenny, and Brutus are all passive homosexuals, as is Mother Dear in Legend 2. Boxing Betty, according to Betty Legend 3, 'liked it both ways'. These accounts bear strong similarities to the Mother Dear narratives, and with one exception, most of them, as is the case with Mother Dear, give no explanations for their sexual preferences. There is no overtly stated motivation for their homosexuality except in the Betty 2 legend where the controlling motif is the revenge motive of a rape victim. This constitutes a distinct difference from Mother Dear, who is never put in a sexual situation that he did not control.

The names of the various anti-heroes are significant. The martial tools of Boxing Betty are apparent in his name. Brutus' name is less likely to have been inspired by Shakespeare or Roman history than by the brutish bully of Popeye cartoons. Lick'em Lenny advertises his sexual inclinations. Fort Knox is more ambiguous, but the name may

be an effort to compare his invulnerability to that of the US Bullion Depository. As discussed previously, ironically bestowing the name Mother Dear on a vicious rapist juxtaposes notions of protector and predator.

In addition, Mother Dear legends are unique in containing a political motif. Introducing the 5% Nation of Islam into the folk biography of Mother Dear as in legends 2 and 6 contextualizes events in the racial politics of the 1960s and 1970s. It is perhaps significant that politically active and martially-aware hip-hop artists such as Wu Tang Clan have specifically referenced the 52s.

Finally, the Mother Dear tale 'types' uniquely allude to the importance of a physical aesthetic through their description of confrontations employing the 52s. As noted previously, significant elements of this aesthetic are described in the passage with which this article began, ones that appear repeatedly in practitioners' discussions of the 52s, such as the signature forearm catch and kiss, the characterization of the fight as an exhibition, taunting and humiliating the opponent, and so on – all mark the performance dimension of the style. As Legend 3 states 'Many Gods [male 5%ers] use to tell me this cat Mother Dear was so nice with the 52 style that he could catch a person jab or punch and kiss [the puncher's fist] at the same time counterattack'. Ubiquitously, competent 52s fighters are depicted as maintaining composure and control while physically destroying an opponent, with the goal being to humiliate, to 'diss' him (i.e., disrespect him).

CONCLUSION **SEX, POWER, MASTERY AND STYLE**

The concepts of control and respect are central to understanding not only Mother Dear but also have relevance in relation to our understanding of other characters and cases of prison rape as a social phenomenon. In a groundbreaking study, Joanne Mariner argues that prison rape is motivated not simply or primarily by sexual desire, but by a desire for dominance, power [2001]. She writes: '[R]ape is an expression of power. It unequivocally establishes the aggressor's dominance, affirming his masculinity, strength and control at the expense of the victim's' [Mariner 2001: 96].

Beyond the general behavioral pattern of the prison rapist that typifies Mother Dear, further insights into his role as a folk hero may be provided by examination of the urban 'Badman' character in African-American folklore. The motivations of the Mother Dear character of prison lore also appears in the anti-heroes of the African-American tradition. These motivations are blatant in the sexuality and virility

that permeate the fantasy realm of performance. One genre in which sexuality is a central theme is the 'toast'. Toasts are long African-American street corner epics. Angela Nelson (2005) argues that these performances are the ancestors of contemporary 'gangsta rap'. Both extoll misogyny, arrogant self-assertion, and violence. In this tradition, Stackolee is typical of the Badman hero, a figure in perpetual revolt who stands outside community norms. He is, like Mother Dear, a particularly urban figure from the lower echelons of city life, described as a world of crime, violent confrontations, and death [Abrahams 1962].

Stackolee

It was back in the time of nineteen hundred and two,
I had a fucked-up deck a cards and I didn't know what to do.
My woman was leavin', she was puttin' me out in the cold.
I said, 'Why you leavin' me, baby?' She said, 'Our love has
grown old'.
So she kept packin' the bags, so I said, 'Fuck it', you know.
So I waded through water and I waded through mud
and I came to this town called the Bucket of Blood.
And I asked the bartender for something to eat,
he give me a dirty glass a water and a tough-assed piece a meat.
I said, 'Bartender, bartender, don't you know who I am?'
He said, 'Frankly, my man, I don't give a goddam'.
I said, 'My name is Stackolee'. He said, 'Oh, yes, I heard about
you up this way,
but I feed you hungry motherfuckers each and every day'.
'Bout this time the poor bartender had gone to rest-
I pumped six a my rockets [bullets] in his motherfucken chest.
A woman run out the back screamin' real loud, said, 'I know
my son ain't dead!'
I said, 'You just check that hole in the ugly motherfucker's
head'.
She say 'You may be bad, your name may be Stack,
but you better not be here when Billy Lyons get back'.
So I walked around the room and I seen this trick,
and we went upstairs and we started real soon.
Now me and this broad we started to tussle
and I drove twelve inches a dick through her ass before she
could move a muscle.
We went downstairs where we were before,
we fucked on the table and all over the floor.
'Bout that time you could hear the drop of a pin-
that bad motherfucker Billy Lyons had just walked in.

He walked behind the counter, seen the bartender dead,
he say, 'Who put this hole in this ugly motherfucker's head'.

Say, 'Who can this man's murderer be?'
One motherfucker say, 'You better speak soft, his name is
Stackolee'.
He say, 'Stack, I'm gonna give you a chance to run before I draw
my gun'.
Bitch jumped up and said, 'Billy, please'.
He shot that whore through both her knees.
A pimp eased up and turned out the lights
and I had him dead in both my sights.
When the lights came back on poor Billy had gone to rest,
I had pumped nine a my rockets in his motherfucken chest.
The next day about half-past ten
I was standin' before the judge and twelve good other men.
They say, 'What can this man's charges be?'
One sonofabitch say, 'Murder in the first degree'.

Another say, 'What can this man's penalty be?'
One say, 'Hang him', another say, 'Give him gas'.
A snaggle-tooth bitch jumped up and say,
'Run that twister through his jivin' ass!'
My woman jumped up and said, 'Let him go free,
'cause there ain't nobody in the world can fuck like Stackolee'.
[Jackson 1974: 46-47]

Regarding Stackolee and similar figures, folklorist Bruce Jackson argues:

sexual relations in the toasts are invariably affectionless and usually affectless; the female exists as a device for exercise and articulation of male options, not as an integral member of a bilateral relationship. There is an apparent inconsistency too important to ignore: sexual conquest of the female is usually presented as being important, yet the object of the conquest is consistently denigrated. The object of conquest has significance only insofar as it is there to be conquered, not for any sequels to the conquest itself. One does not conquer the female to have sex; it is with sex [...] one negotiates, executes, and terminates the conquest. What remains is only an object as inferior as the protagonist insisted it was at the beginning, for all function is then denied it.
[Jackson 1974: 129]

Mother Dear of legends takes a similar attitude toward his sexual prey. Note phrases such as: 'they beat you to submission', 'starting knocking cats out in jail and taking they ass, using the 52 Blocks', 'if brother on the outside knew that you got punk, raped, they knew that you get no respect', 'urban community, if found out they got punk, that most likely got beat down bad'. All clearly suggest that a primary reward to the perpetrator for rape is subjugation and humiliation of the victim,

not simply sexual satisfaction. Exercising power over another member of the prison population accrues social capital for the aggressor. Commonly this entails being put into a female role by a social 'female', but whether the victim is forced to play the active or passive role, he is rendered powerless and thus subordinate in the prevailing social hierarchy.

As Robertson asserts: 'The quest for dominance and control over other inmates – not sexual release – best explains male custodial rape. Prison sexual predators are typically heterosexual. Their victims, however, involuntarily assume female roles in the prison sexual system' [Robertson 2003]. If the toasts' characterization of male-female relationships can serve as a gauge, domination by Mother Dear (a 'female') is the ultimate diss. Mother Dear, therefore, is motivated by more complex drives than sex. The desire to rise in the prison hierarchy through intimidation and domination by means of sex carries equal importance.

The preceding remarks grapple with contradictory issues that arise from a consideration of the 52 Hand Blocks. For example, while other fighting styles may be equally effective, much of the superiority of the 52s is attributed to the belief that it is, in the words of one resource person, 'the "flyest" [most stylish] way of kicking ass'. The aesthetic dimension of the skills displayed by the highest level practitioners, such as Mother Dear, is an omnipresent motif in comments such as he 'was so nice [polished/adept] with it', and so on. An example of a 'nice' element would be the signature move of catching an opponent's punch and kissing the fist before contemptuously throwing it back at the assailant. While this gesture may have only a hint of the homoeroticism central to the Mother Dear narratives, it places the opponent in a dominated relationship by means of an overtly sexual gesture. As such, it serves as a powerful 'diss'. A consideration of similar features of the 52s may help to resolve the apparently contradictory nature of touting a homosexual who in the narratives above engages in the passive role and at least once is described as being as close to a woman in appearance as possible as the founder of an extraordinarily effective martial style.

When turning to the macrocosmic level of violent sex as a tool for asserting dominance in the penal system, these features of the 52s and the Mother Dear legends display an internal logic. The motif of the weaponization of sex has echoes in the 'Badman toasts' depicting characters like Stackolee of African-American folk tradition. What appears to be a cross-generic motif in vernacular martial practice and oral narrative calls for further investigation, as do other potential similarities among performance and martial culture in other populations.

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