





*Feather Bricks Mission Statement: We provide brave spaces to celebrate creative, encouraging, and instructive expressions.*



Graphic Art by Marshall Stewart

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

In short order, the stage will be ours. So, please help me in extending a very well-earned CONGRATULATIONS!!! to the North Park Theological Seminary School of Restorative Arts' Second Cohort for finishing a very difficult journey. I would not have wanted to have experienced this via dolorosa with any other group of men. I learned so much about all of you guys. Many of you surprised me, and that's not an easy feat. Your strength. Your courage. Your intelligence. Your love. Your loyalty. I truly find myself awed by what I have seen from our group. It's been nothing but sheer genius!

You have shown yourselves to be innovative, fresh, unprecedented, inventive, creative, advanced, modern, pioneering, groundbreaking, revolutionary, radical, and new fangled (all of that jacked straight out of the OXFORD AMERICAN WRITER'S THESAURUS...and all of it true). You showed yourselves to be tenacious and strong and worthy of every accolade you will receive. You faced fierce headwinds that neither bent nor broke you. You overcame what would have been insurmountable obstacles to many. You did this! When one struggled, you strove to carry him. When one suffered, he found comfort and shelter in the embrace of brotherhood. Even nature (Covid) was no match for our collective desire to succeed.

Every single thing that we have accomplished, we accomplished together. We've figured this 'community' thing out and have learned to live it (especially when the going got tough). So, yeah. All of us have earned this celebration. CELEBRATE!!!...together. But after, let us carry on into tomorrow the works that we began yesterday. The world keeps on moving. So, too, must we. R.I.P. 'BIG FELLA' (4/13/20). You made it.

\*\*\*To the lady who put all of us on her back and carried us these last few months, Melissa Pavlik...Thank you. --Elton Williams

Thanks, Elton.

What's up everyone? This is Yarmale, a proud member of the 2nd cohort. What can I say that has not been said? These four years (some of us it's been 5 years) have been arduous to say the least. There was a lot of hurt, frustration, confusion, and disappointments, but we endured individually and collectively, and with God's protective arms wrapped around us, and by his grace, we made it through. We were in a war (fight) against ourselves, our view of each other, our narrowmindedness, the false assumptions and narratives perpetuated by outside noise that tried very hard to divide and conquer, but we united to destroy all that said we couldn't do it. We destroyed every box we were told to get in. We shined God's light that each of us carry inside, that the darkness around us had to flee! Gentlemen, let's take this moment to enjoy all of this because we worked extremely hard, and we deserve the fruits of our hard labor.

My brothers, I stand with you, I love each of you, and I'm truly grateful and honored to cross this finish line with you united as a community, or should I say 2nd Cohort. As I look back to the beginning of this journey and remember how I never talked to any outside students nor did I speak to the professors (only if my brothers didn't know the answer), I only sat next to TK, Vega, and "Big Fella." Now, I've matured and am confident in my thoughts, beliefs, and what I have to say and contribute. I can see the maturity in my brothers also. I had a discussion with Elton, TK, Sherron, DeCedrick, and Marshal and a question was asked: "What does Transformative Justice look like?" As I write this, I can see a very clear image. Look in the mirror, Gentlemen, because we epitomize Transformative Justice! To our brother Joseph "Big Fella" Wilson, we love you, we miss you, and we carry you with us across the finish line because we will leave no man behind. 2nd cohort, we came, we saw, we conquered, Together! Continue to Be Great Gentlemen Phil 4:13 Romans 8:31 See you on May 31! Yarmale Thomas



**Elton Williams**



**Yarmale Thomas**





## *Dialogue & Discuss*

"Let the Redeemed of the Lord Say So" (Psalms 107:2)  
By **David "Cap" Carter**

We have had the opportunity over these past four plus years to study together, to learn to appreciate the value and strength of words and narratives. More importantly, we have learned the value and significance of self-awareness. Salvation and restoration are always found in freedom from oppression. So, when other human beings tell you that your worth has no value, don't believe them; they're liars. You're a child of the King, and you are redeemed. When they try to convince you that you're incorrigible, anti-social, unable to conform to the laws and norms of society, don't believe them. They're liars. You're a child of the King, and you are redeemed. When people shout from their nice comfortable ivory towers, "Lock them up, throw away the key!" painting narratives of criminality upon your beautiful brown bronzed skin, don't believe them. They're liars. You are a child of the King, and you are redeemed. When they judge you irredeemable, with no conscience, outside the grace, love, and will of God, don't believe them. They're liars. You are a child of the King, and you are redeemed. When they tell you that you will never amount to anything, not worth the time of day, don't believe them. They're liars. You're a child of the King, and you are redeemed. When they try to indoctrinate you with false narratives of redemption, exalting people like Thomas Jefferson, a man who "owned" over 600 slaves, my ancestors, or George Washington, a man who "owned" over 300 slaves, my ancestors, or a man like Andrew Jackson, who "owned" over 200 slaves, my ancestors. These people and more murdered, committed genocide of millions of other human beings. They raped, molested, robbed, and committed unspeakable atrocities upon humanity, but managed to find redemption in these people. They build monuments to them, revere them in the halls of Congress, create and maintain national holidays to their "greatness," paint glowing narratives in the history of storytelling to them, and place their images, engraved, dearly upon their currency, under the caption, "IN GOD WE TRUST." So when they tell you there is nothing redeemable about you, don't believe them. They're liars. You're a child of the King, and you are redeemed.

Furthermore, I believe that every soul is worthy of redemption. So I implore these naysayers to remove those decorative Bible symbols from their mantles, and open them up, read them, and study them. I won't tell you where to start, but start somewhere. You are more than a conqueror. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. You were made in the image and likeness of God, and He that has done a great work in you is faithful to perform it. There's a King living in you; embrace your King, because when he made you he said that you were good. So, if anyone ever tries to tell you anything other than that, don't believe them. They're liars. You are a child of the King, and you are redeemed. SO let the redeemed of the Lord say so!!!!

**David W. Carter**, Graduating Class of 2023, NPTS SRA

The Whole is Greater Than The Sum Of Its Parts By **Todd Smith**

Greatness is that indefinable 'something' when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A song is just a collection of notes, rhymes & words crafted in such a way as to produce a melody & chorus. Many songwriters pursue greatness, yet greatness is oft times elusive. The great songs stand apart. A story is just a collection of characters, plots & subplots crafted in such a way as to produce drama, interest, climax & resolution. Many authors pursue greatness, yet greatness is oft times elusive. The great stories stand apart. A graduate is just a collection of experiences & knowledge imparted, crafted & molded in such a way as to produce wisdom & cause transformation. Colleges & universities strive to create greatness, yet greatness is oft times elusive. The great graduates stand apart.

I submit that each man crossing that graduation stage is individually greater than the sum of the last 4 years. Each one has been taught & guided by caring, intelligent, wise professors. The Holy Spirit has influenced many of these professors to love & care & pour into these men in ways that create that indefinable something in each of these graduates. Many of these graduates have dedicated hundreds of hours to study – sacrificing yard time, sleep, phone calls, commissary & sometimes even showers (during intensives. students must choose to go to class or take a shower) in the pursuit of greatness as a student. These are transformed men, wiser men, great men.

I also submit that this 2023 graduating class is a great class. It is greater than the sum of its parts. While it is true that individually each one of these transformed men have already had a positive, life-affirming impact on those around them, together these men have truly achieved greatness. These men together have accomplished more in the last 4 years than many people outside the wall accomplish in a lifetime! That is greatness personified. To you great men in the class of 2023, I say I'm proud to call you peers, I'm proud to call you friends. You are in part responsible for my own personal transformation, and I thank you for your support, insight, prayer, inspiration & friendship. I love you all.

**Sherron (Sosa) Dillon: Transformation**

When I look back on my life since I have been in prison and ponder on what played the biggest role in my transformation, I have to point to God and education. When I first came to Stateville 23½ years ago, I was young with a boat load of time. I was lost, trying to figure out what my life was going to become. I remember when I was first placed into the Pre-GED class my teacher was Mr. Allen classroom 10. To be honest I initially didn't take school serious, but Mr. Allen stayed. My first time taking the Tabe test I failed, which felt really bad because I not only failed myself but also Mr. Allen. So I got a really good math book, and I spent hours in the cell studying math. When I was in class, I sat at Mr. Allen's desk trying to soak up as much as I could about the math I was learning. Long story short, I eventually passed the Tabe test – jumping across the hall to pass the Pre-GED test, and the GED on my first try. During this time I became driven to learn, I bought books about African and African American history. I also studied Islam on a deep level. This helped me look at myself and my people in a different light. The rough edges I wore began to be smoothed out.

After the GED accomplishment, what did I do next? The Barber College came calling. I've been around barbering my whole life, but I didn't see myself loving barbering as much as I do. Through my learning and teaching barbering, my eyes have been taken to a whole other level of possibilities. Once again, I'm looking to elevate. So one day I'm sitting in the Barber shop at my station, listening to one of my close friends talking about how great North Park SRA is. Over time I heard some other friends say similar things about North Park. At the first opportunity I filled out an application, and Yes! I got in.

The North Park orientation was powerful, but when North Park staff dropped them 15 books on me, I was like, "Damn, what have I gotten myself into?" I have to say I've had an awakening from the education I received from North Park. It has been a meaningful experience. Shout out to all the great professors: Armida, Ken, Michelle Clifton, Sandra, Dr Pierre, Kim, Soon Chan Rah, Cheryl Lynn; Dominique; Dr. Dave, Restrepo, Michelle Dodson, Phil Jackson, and Will. Last but not least, Melissa Pavlik (writing center Director/Associate Professor) I can't thank enough. She has been a God send for this community. Melissa has me thinking about writing in ways that I wasn't capable of dreaming years ago. So thanks a lot; I'll keep...writing on.

As I close, I not only recognize the transformative power of education in North Park, but in the great men of UWW and Northwestern. The ABE, Pre-GED, and GED brothers, I see your hunger, so keep taking those steps towards educational elevation. PEACE!

**Trauma & Pain Birth My Purpose!**

When we hear the words trauma and pain, the first thing that comes to mind is something that has occurred, which makes sense. In most cases, this is correct. However, I want to look at trauma and pain from a different perspective. When a woman becomes pregnant, she endures a lot of discomfort and pain within her body while the baby she is carrying grows. She has to endure morning sickness, back pain, and lack of sleep because she's unable to get comfortable as her body begins to change. She has to constantly get up to go to the bathroom. There are times when her legs and or feet will swell. As the baby begins to move in her womb, this too causes serious discomfort and pain. Then the moment of truth comes when she goes into labor. This pain is very traumatic to a woman's body and unimaginable for those of us who are not able to have a baby (men). Let's not forget the baby that's coming is enduring pain and being traumatized because this baby is leaving the only world it has ever known, the safety of their mother's womb, and being thrust out through the birth canal. Then they are shocked by their new world that now surrounds them. Now when this process is over (sometimes this can last for hours), the woman is happy and has great joy that her baby she carried for 9 months is now safe in her arms. Wow! That's painful and traumatizing to think about. Yet it is such a blessing! (I want to express my deepest respect and gratitude to every woman that has endured this process).





Trauma and pain in my life has been no different. I've experienced an endured a lot of pain (emotional, mental, physical and spiritual) throughout my life, and at one point I couldn't see past the pain. There were instances when I was so accustomed to the pain that I wore it like a cloak. Once I became incarcerated in 2004, I had a complete mental and emotional breakdown which landed me in the psych ward for almost 8 straight years. I began intensive mental health talk therapy sessions (one-on-one and group) beginning with Dr. Brinny at Cook County Jail prior to my trial and after being convicted and being transferred to the N.R.C. in 2007; I had talk therapy with Dr. Timothy Cummings all while taking a cocktail of psych meds that often left me in a stupor. I was transferred to Dixon psych X-house where I met Dr. Melvin Hinton who really helped me identify and process through the pain and traumas that I had carried for decades and once believed were normal. Somewhere in this process (a lot of one-on-one and group therapy and a lot of people praying for me), God healed my emotions, my mind, my spirit, and he healed my heart.

Today I'm still in talk therapy, but I haven't taken any psychotropic medication in almost 7 years. I have a fervent desire to become a Trauma and Healing Behavioral Therapist to help others identify and process their pain and traumas and assist them in learning what a healthy life style is (mental, emotional, spiritual and physical). My pain, trauma, and ultimate healing have birthed my purpose! Today, I am a mental health and emotional health wellness advocate that has a deep desire to make a positive impact on this world.

**Trauma – Pain – Healing – Purpose = making a difference**

**Yarmale Thomas**

### Rehabilitation v. Habilitation by **Antonio Kendrick**

In the American carceral system, individuals in custody, generally, cannot be released until they have been rehabilitated. The question is "What does rehabilitation mean?" According to the Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, rehabilitation means to "retrain, reinstate, re-make ready, or return to the original state," but what does that mean for the victims of the preschool to prison pipeline? You know, those juveniles and young adults from historically underserved and underresourced communities? Those are young people who have been victims of systemic violence themselves – even from the public school system: a public school system whose curriculum normalizes and perpetuates Eurocentric pedagogy but devalorizes blackness, a public school system that criminalizes the totality of Black expression, Black speech, Black dress, Black hair, and Black art. Expressions are demonized and punished through zero tolerance policies that are enforced in a manner that disproportionately impacts youth of color, resulting in youth of color being PUSHED OUT of school and into the streets. That being said, I again ask the question, "What does rehabilitation, a word that is often used but remains undefined in America's various criminal codes of correction, mean to individuals who entered the Illinois Department of Corrections as kids? What does it look like? If rehabilitation means to retrain, reinstate, and remake ready, how can you retrain, reinstate, and remake ready someone who has never been trained, instated, or made ready in the first place? It makes rehabilitation impossible.

Let's deconstruct the word rehabilitation. The root word of rehabilitation is "habilitation" or "habilitate," which, according to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, means to "make fit for society or service." So, one cannot be rehabilitated. Look at it from this perspective. We've all heard about people buying old run down houses and fixing them up to flip. This process is called "rehabbing" which is short for rehabilitation. The reason why the house can be rehabbed, rehabilitated, or restored to its former state is because it had already previously served its function and still has a foundation and structure that will enable it to be restored to its former state. It doesn't have to be built from the ground up or habilitated.



## *Dialogue & Discuss*

Considering what has been said, people who come to prison can go on that journey of self discovery via religion, education, or any combination of the two and habilitate themselves. Have you ever wondered why Illinois legislators have never defined the terms rehabilitation and habilitation? I have. I think it's because once they define and codify what rehabilitation and habilitation look like, what they are actually doing is revealing when one's imprisonment is no longer in the best interest of society nor the individual in custody. By not defining these terms, every decision that Illinois lawmakers make, as pertains to parole, will be arbitrary. By not defining these terms, every parole decision and clemency recommendation that the Prisoner Review Board makes will be arbitrary.

I've had the opportunity to listen to proponents of both Parole Illinois and Restore Justice. As it pertains to years served before being parole eligible, Parole Illinois' plan just makes more sense, but that's neither here nor there. Neither of these entities have pushed to have legislators define the terms of rehabilitation and habilitation. If they did, they would understand how ARBITRARY any fixed number of years served before being parole eligible really is. The argument is that IDOC or whoever doesn't have to let us go... just give us a shot. Think about that. If the goal post is not stationary, it will continue to be moved, and parole hearing outcomes will be dictated by whether your hearing officers had a good night's sleep or whether their significant other made them breakfast that morning. Proponents of criminal justice and sentencing reform will never be as successful as they could be until those terms are objectively defined. Defining two simple, albeit important, words is not only the tipping point for criminal justice and sentencing reform in the State of Illinois, but a codified pathway for everyone's freedom.

### Legacy by **Elton Williams**

Legacy is defined as "something handed down by a predecessor." Some view it as a "model worthy of imitation" or the "best possible exemplification of an ideal." Whichever way one imagines or reimagines the meaning of legacy, our lives and activities leave an indelible and lasting imprint upon this world, today and tomorrow. This is the truth of all of us. As I contemplated how I felt and how I might approach the issue of legacy, military history dominated my thought process. An overly-broad interaction with military history will, in fact, be a big part of this piece, but I will not be regaling you with tales of fabled figures such as Benjamin O. Davis Jr. or George S. Patton, nor will I take this opportunity to celebrate the unlikely achievements of the U.S.S. John Paul Jones in his naval battles. This is about my 'Band of Brothers', the S.R.A's Second Cohort, and the legacy we intend to leave.

You might ask, "What does military history have to do with the S.R.A's Second Cohort?" Well, absolutely nothing. Then again... everything. Several veterans sit within this Cohort's ranks (myself included). The reason that this history fits so well into Second Cohort's narrative is because U.S. military history is history made as a result of 'actions of intentionality' on the part of its actors and, for this reason, I have decided to set our dreams and our hopes, our struggle and our overcoming, our intentional activity, over and against the highly imitative history of America's soldiers.



It was the dedication to craft, the instinct for innovation, the pride in themselves and their work, that distinguished the women and men who have served America from those who have served other countries the world over. It was their dedication which created, and cemented in history, the near-mythological status of America's protectors. This dedication helped to build a legacy that yet endures.

Because of all that the courage of our soldiers desired and accomplished, we today live and exist in legacy. From those soldiers who met their Maker on the battlefield and those who survived to relay to the recipients of their bravery the horrors of their experience, we must draw lessons on what it means to be intentional about creating and establishing legacy...what it takes to maintain it.

Each generation of Soldier, Sailor, and Airman trained the following generation and taught them about how important it was that they consistently endeavor to out perform and outdo all that the previous generations (themselves included) had achieved. And in speaking of Second Cohort's imminent ascension, these internal and external conversations amongst our number, the wondering, the marveling, kept me cognizant of the fact that our graduation is about more than the moment. It is about yesterday and tomorrow.

Our graduation is about passing along, or leaving to be perpetuated, the high standards and ideals that many of us have set and established for ourselves. It is about the 'no person left behind' mentality that has helped to shape our mission (this includes the S.R.A's Third Cohort and our sisters in Logan). It is about what this program has the potential to become.

While whatever we do or achieve over the next few months will never measure up to or compare to what has been accomplished by America's fighting women and men, a demarche (a plan of action) has formed within this Cohort and a vision for the legacy has been conceived. Our dedication to this mission, our present and future contributions to this program and to this world, will be what sets us apart.

Like those who led the way for us all, we aspire to inspire succeeding Cohorts to reach higher and farther, to take the reigns of their future into their own hands and fashion legacy for themselves. Our challenge to all of you readers with any power to 'push' (help) is "Will you assist us in cementing the legacy we seek? Or will you sit idle, miss this moment, and allow the potentiality for legacy to pass you by?"



Kim Foxx at North Park Graduation (2022) by **Matthew Rosario**

When I learned about Kim Foxx being a keynote speaker and guest at North Park's first graduation of incarcerated students last year, I could not believe it. I soon learned it was true and said to myself, "It's ironic that Ms. Foxx attended the graduation." After all, her office is the same one which convicted and sought long sentences on so many people who are incarcerated at Stateville. However, once I heard her speech and saw some photos of her standing with some of the graduates, my view changed. This woman recognized and witnessed the accomplishment of these men who earned a Master's degree. It was at this point that I became inspired to pursue my own studies. I am determined more than ever now to earn my GED and then apply to one of the college programs. Just knowing that people like Kim Foxx recognize academic achievements makes me want to be a better me through education. I hope others feel the same way.



# *Dialogue & Discuss*

**By Jami Anderson**

How do you respond to a question of moral importance? Do you go straight to the Scriptures? Do you answer from your heart? If I were to ask you where you stand morally on the issue of same-sex marriage, how would you qualify your answer? This is the question laid before me. Do I answer for or against it, and how would I justify my answer? Personally and morally, I am for same-sex marriage. Not because my attraction has always been toward women, though God knows I tried to fight it. The following pages present my reasoning with, hopefully, enough justification to make even the toughest critics at least stop and think.

Homosexuality has long been a topic of taboo within the church. The bible is a testament to androcentric literature. Leviticus chapter eighteen gives us strict laws pertaining to sexual relations (Dakes, p.225). It was written for a patriarchal society in a time when masculinity was revered and worshiped. The scripture has numerous accounts of rape and what some would juxtapose as homosexuality or homosexual activity. However, the use of the term was not coined until the nineteenth century C.E. (Freedman, p.602). Same-sex relations in the modern sense have no equivalent in the Hebrew or Greek language (p.603). Do the ancient texts speak directly about homosexuality? Mostly the term "homosexual" appears in the later English translations, but it is uncertain if that is the true meaning of those passages.

For centuries, sex has been used as a show of dominance (The Reformation Project). There are some cultures where men will rape other men as a way to dehumanize them. Sex was a way to say, "I am the more powerful, dominant one, and you are weak." Throughout time, men have forced themselves, their will, on other men and women. However, that is rape and does not constitute homosexuality. In Greco-Roman times, same-sex relations were a sign of excess, not bonds of love (The Reformation Project). Look at Genesis 18:16-19:26, the story of Sodom (Dakes, p.24-25). The men of Sodom were not accused of being homosexual. They knew instinctually that the two visitors were there to judge them. Therefore, they wanted to show their masculinity and dominate them through the act of gang rape. The same thing happens in Judges 19:18-29 (Dakes, p.483). The crowd of men were not ravaging homosexuals hell bent to get their kicks. They were just men trying to "outman" the new guys in town. Later, in Romans 1:18-32, Paul writes of same-sex relations as impure, but he does not condemn it as a sin. Maybe he says this because that was not his orientation. Regardless, the Scripture only states male-male sex is an abomination in the Old Testament, and only claims same-sex relations as unnatural to Paul in Romans (Freedman, p.306).

There are recorded instances in the Bible where same-sex "commitments" were held as sacred. Look at the story of Ruth and Naomi (Dake's, p.493-498). Though the sacred text does not say that they were in a conjugal relationship, looking through the lens of the LGBTQ+ community there is a possibility that they were more to each other. Ruth chose to give up her homeland and her family to cling to Naomi. Later is the story of David and Jonathan that is told throughout first and second Samuel (Dake's, p.531-605). 1 Samuel 18:1-3 speaks of Jonathan whose soul was "knit" to the soul of David (Dake's, p.531). Is this an ancient term for "soulmates"? They were bound together by a covenant. Is not marriage a form of covenant? They openly loved each other. Now, here is the real question, "How can love in any form be a sin when we worship a God whose entire deity is based on love?"





(by Jami Anderson, cont...)

Nowadays, we have more information to work with than our counterparts did in antiquity. We have to interpret the Scripture through new filters of science along with our own theological stories (The Reformation Project). As Christians, we have to find a way of continuing to integrate the plethora of data we have been amassing as we have already begun to do.

It has been theologically understood that with the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the old laws have been done away with. Jesus has forged a new covenant. Therefore, if the old laws are now void, why are so many Christians so adamant that same-sex marriage is a sin? If those Christians still hold to the “law” of the Old Testament, then there are hundreds of “laws” that must be upheld from adultery being a death sentence, marrying a non-virgin, no eating of pork or shellfish, a death penalty for a stubborn son, women not wearing men’s clothing, wearing clothes of different fabrics, and so many more! One cannot pick and choose what “laws” Jesus abolished with his blood.

The fact is, there is a growing number of people who do not swim in the mainstream “normality”. There is a whole community that statistically do not meet the hetero-normative social expectations of sex and family. Even though we are a small but growing number, do we not deserve the same level of acceptance? Would that acceptance not be teaching us? Christians need to be more forward thinking, looking to the future of what Christianity could be, instead of staying stuck in the patriarchal club of the biblical times.

The Scriptures tell us repeatedly that God is love. John 3:16 tells us that God loved us so much that He sacrificed His one and only begotten son for our sins. Ephesians 5:1-2 implores us to follow God’s example of unconditional love. Colossians 3:12-14 speaks of we, Christians, being God’s chosen people and that of all virtues, we are to put on love as it binds us in perfect unity. 1 John 3:14 states further that anyone who does not love remains in death. Then, 1 John 3:18 takes it a step up saying let us not love only in our actions. 1 Corinthians 13 speaks heavily of love being the greatest of the virtues. Imagine reading about the defining qualities of love, feeling that swell of emotion from the personification of those traits. Now imagine being told those traits and virtues are not for you because you love the wrong gender. Yet, 1 Corinthians 14:1 tells us to pursue love. The entire basis of the Bible is love. So, how can the unconditional love I feel for my future spouse, who is a transgender man, be a sin when God has ordained it?



Show Love, Cohort 2

By **Michael Jones**

We cross through the fires of triumph over controversy of fulfilling the requirements. We bow our heads for our brothers and sisters who didn't make it through COVID-19 or other illness. We thank North Park Theological Seminary for taking a chance on us. Also, we thank the Alumni that did show us the way. Congratulations to all the Graduates; we don't forget our brothers and sisters who fell sick and had to pause for a second. Shout out to ALL OF OUR PROFESSORS, Cohort 2, Teaching Fellows, and all staff that participate with us. Shout out to Cohort 3: you are on your way.

**All the writing wasn't in vain.**



The Community will be sending shout outs to what we learn, to be better producers to our families, communities, and fellow cohorts coming through. "We are family, we are community, WE ARE NORTH PARK ALUMNI NOW IS THE TIME, SHOW LOVE!"

# COHORT 2 BIOS

**Vaughn Washington** earned his Master of Arts degree in Christian Ministry from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. Additionally to his MA CM degree and certificates, Vaugh Washington completed North Park University Writing Advisor training and is a volunteer Writing Advisor for North Park's Writing Center, and he's a published author and writer for the *Feather Bricks* bi-monthly newsletter.

## **Marshall Stewart**

Earning his Master of Arts in Restorative Justice Ministries in May 2023, Marshall Stewart reflects his role as a servant of Jesus Christ by his availability to all, especially in Spanish—si tú necesitas, as an educator, Writing Advisor, tutor, pastor, facilitator, and peer. As a First Nations Chippewa tribal member and Stateville choir member, he displays the power of worship and prayer in the Spirit. Furthermore, he is eager to steward his medical and non-profit fundraising undergraduate education that others may be served and ultimately experience Christ-centric love and grace.

## **Kenneth Key; MA, RJM**

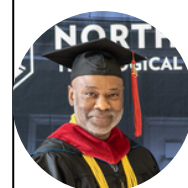
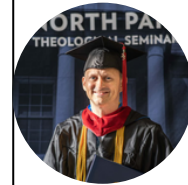
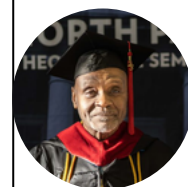
His name is Kenneth Key, but everyone calls him by his spiritual name (ANANYAH) which means “the Covering of God.” If there is one thing he would want all to know, he is not his past. He earned his Master's Degree in Restorative Arts Ministries. He is an artist, a writer, and poet. He tries to express his reality through all mediums. Ananyah says these mediums are therapeutic and thus he would like to use these tools in helping marginalized children once released.

## **Todd Smith**

Todd C. Smith holds an MA in Christian Ministry from NPTS's SRA. His extensive background in business and entrepreneurial pursuits includes hosting his own “Safe Money” radio show, teaching the Adult Continuing Education course titled “The ABC's of Safe Money” and leading hundreds of seminars in the insurance and financial services industry. Todd is a Writing Advisor and former co-editor of the *Feather Bricks* newsletter. He was elected a class representative to work with peers to create meaningful ways to serve their community and maximize their political impact as recipients of MACM and MARJM degrees. His education and experience, coupled with his call to activism, help to make him an effective force for transformative justice. He hopes to facilitate a well-planned and much-needed Financial Literacy Course after graduation to other individuals in custody.

## **Thomas Mills**

Thomas Mills is a Master of Arts graduate from North Park Theological Seminary. He received high honors on his road to restoration and redemption for re-envisioning ways to lean into his inherent ability to apply hard work, dedication, resilience, collaboration, active learning, and organizational task management. He is a firm believer in collaborative conversation as an important tool to develop ideas and perspectives. He has been intentional in displaying a spirit of humility and a renewed hunger for learning. This perspective has equipped him spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.





# COHORT 2 BIOS

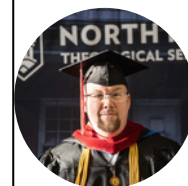
## Michael Jones

Michael Jones "serves" his role as a servant of Jesus Christ; he is available to all, especially as a tutor, writing advisor, pastor, and peer. He is a Literacy Volunteers of America tutor, helping students to strive for excellence. He is a Stateville Choir Member. He always puts worship and prayer first. He is a prayer warrior, willing to lend a hand in legal affairs. Ultimately characteristic of his experience is the phrase "loving to serve others." He enjoys playing sports, and laughing.



## Jamie Thomasson

Jamie Thomasson, US Navy Veteran and North Park Writing Advisor and graduate, earned his Master of Arts degree in Christian Ministry from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. *Feather Bricks* would like to thank Mr. Thomasson especially for his commitment to amplifying veteran voices in the regular column "The Veteran Voices of Stateville."



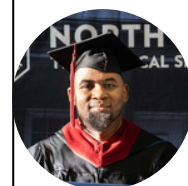
## Aryules Bivens

Aryules Bivens earned his Master of Arts degree in Christian Ministry from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. He is working to promote and provide accessibility options and accommodations for all learners in the education building. The Writing Center looks forward to learning more about his current research on ways to best support writers with disabilities, including, but not limited to, dyslexia.



## Amotto L. Jackson

"This has been more than anything that I have ever went through. I had some good times, and there were some very bad times! Overall, though, this has been one of the best five years running that I have ever had, and with this being said, let me say God is Good!!! Thank you to all of you that have had a part in making this all happen for me." Amotto earned his Master of Arts degree in Christian Ministry from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. *Feather Bricks* notes we have never not seen a smile on Amotto Jackson's face, and we appreciate the contagion of light he brings with him. (Yes, that is a double negative, intentionally used for emphasis.)



## Robert Maury

earned his Master of Arts degree in Christian Ministry from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. He is an avid reader, writer, and thinker who enjoys discussing theories in his free time. He is also a Writing Advisor ready and willing to converse with any writer about any assignment at any stage in the process. Read his essay on the importance of theory in this newsletter's "The Amplifier" column.



# COHORT 2 BIOS

## Antonio Balderas

Antonio "Slim" Balderas earned his Master of Arts degree in Restorative Justice Ministries from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. He is a Writing Advisor and self-proclaimed Poet Laureate of North Park Theological Seminary's School of Restorative Arts, and also known as "V.O.T.P.A.I." (Voice of the Poor and Incarcerated). His poetry has been presented and published in a variety of places to promote action steps connected to North Park's Christian, intercultural, and city-centered distinctives.



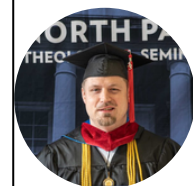
## David Carter

David "Cap" Carter earned his Master of Arts degree in Restorative Justice Ministries from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. Let's take our caps off for "Cap" and appreciate the musicality he has brought to his cohort and community throughout this educational journey.



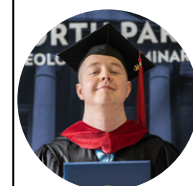
## Robert John

Robert John earned his Master of Arts degree in Restorative Justice Ministries from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. He is a writing advisor ready and willing to converse with any writer about any assignment at any stage in the process. Ask about his "Mobile Writers Network" idea, read about it in *Feather Bricks*, or connect with him personally to experience a conversational conference on the go.



## Ryan Miller

Ryan Miller earned his Master of Arts degree in Restorative Justice Ministries from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. He aims to continue to use his gift of musicality to work towards restorative of self and community. *Feather Bricks* applauds his completion of the Writing Advisor tutor training course this semester and his ability to bring his full self into the writing process.



## James Degorski

James Degorski earned his Master of Arts degree in Restorative Justice Ministries from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices.



# COHORT 2 BIOS

## DeCedrick Walker

DeCedrick "LFD" Walker earned his Master of Arts degree in Restorative Justice Ministries and North Park Theological Seminary's award for academic excellence in Theology. (He may be "Late for Dinner" but is never late for class.) He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. He is a writing advisor ready and willing to converse with any writer about any assignment at any stage in the process. Check out his regular column "Here's a Thought" in *Feather Bricks*.



## Sherron Dillon

Sherron "Cicero Sosa" Dillon earned his Master of Arts degree in Restorative Justice Ministries from North Park Theological Seminary. He also earned certificates in Foundation (Ministry Education), Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Practices. As a writing advisor, he is ready to assist writers with thesis statement ideas, essay organization and development, and tricky grammar questions. He is also a Barber College Supervisor and Scrabble champ.



## Ben Meyer

Ben Meyer states, "I continue to be amazed by and thankful for how God has made a way for me to attend North Park Theological Seminary to obtain a Master's degree while in prison. God took what should be a place of bondage and transformed it into a place of educational liberation. But he didn't do it alone. As Professor Armida Belmonte-Stephens noted, 'Nothing good just happens; it takes the hard work of dedicated people to bring about positive change.' With that in mind, I am grateful to the visionaries, financiers, administrators, professors, and volunteers who sacrificed their time, energy, and resources so that I might be blessed by this wonderful experience. I am also grateful to the Illinois Department of Corrections administrators, educational staff, and correctional officers for allowing me this opportunity to redeem this time as I serve my prison sentence.



## Ronald Steele

Ronald Steele holds his Master's degree in Restorative Justice Ministries, with certificates: Foundations, Transformational Justice, Restorative Justice, and Pastoral care. His journey during the last four years has been bittersweet; the bitter was Covid-19 that robbed him of two precious years of getting to know his colleagues. The sweet has been his great education and relationships utilizing his personal expertise in Pastoral Arts. He is an Ambassador for Christ and open to share words of encouragement and to shepherd those in need. As a prayer warrior, he also loves to engage in worship and praise to honor God's Kingdom.





# COHORT 2 BIOS

## **Yarmale Thomas**

I was born on the Westside of Chicago on Thanksgiving Day in 1977 to a single Black woman. I could not have predicted my life's journey, but I'm humbled and so grateful. I'm the younger brother of a very protective sister (thank you TeTe). My life has been filled with a lot of dysfunction, conflict, pain, and trauma. Somewhere on life's path, I realized (by God and Jesus' grace and insight) that I wanted more for my life, and I was terrified of this feeling. However, God had a plan! Trauma is a bad, bad thing, but it doesn't have to be. In God's hands, trauma became healing, healing produced purpose, purpose produced power. All of this had been transformative; better yet, it has created Yarmale Thomas.



## **Larry Luellen**

Larry Luellen Jr, Master Degree recipient in Restorative Justice Ministries, has certificates in Transformative Justice, Restorative Justice, Pastoral Care, and Foundations. His walk with God and life has been a journey within a journey: many bumps and bruises, turns and twists, failures, and accomplishments to say the least. Yet, he's learned to lean on the strength and wisdom of God instead of himself and that's been focal to his growth as a man, father, brother, friend, and servant of God! Larry will use the skills he's obtained to challenge and change the norm within his community, creating new pathways that decrease crime, violence and recidivism. His goal is to be the mouth, hands, and feet of Jesus, ministering the words and actions and love instead of hate and division.



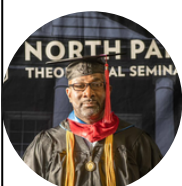
## **Eric James Watkins**

Eric James Watkins earned a Master's degree in Restorative Justice Ministry; graduating with high honors and receiving the "Innovative Ministry" award from North Park Theological Seminary. Also, he earned four certificates in Foundational, Restorative Justice, Transformative Justice, and Pastoral Care Education, and he became a certified Writing Advisor for North Park University — teaching and helping incarcerated graduate, and undergraduate, and G.E.D students. Eric is also founder and director of H.E.A.L (Higher Education Ameliorates Lives) — a mentoring ministry that provides mentorship and college scholarships for youths from violence and mass incarceration impacted communities and contexts. Additionally, Eric is a Northeastern Illinois University graduate, with a Bachelor's Degree, triple majoring in Urban-American Jurisprudence, Transformative Justice, and Education Studies. Eric still volunteers as a DePaul University Restorative Justice (Inside/Outside Program) trainer and Think-Tank mentor — producing legislation for the betterment of communities in Illinois. Eric Watkins is a committed servant of Jesus Christ and communities. Currently, he is working with a University of Illinois professor creating new curricula for K-12th graders.



## **Antonio "TK" Kendrick**

Antonio "TK" Kendrick is a community leader, racial justice activist, business owner, and visionary. His educational background is in Criminal Justice Administration, Restorative Justice, and Transformative Justice. He is a systems thinker and someone who is angered by inequity and injustice. He loves God, and his legacy is to leave the world better than it was when he came into it. He is a fighter and has no problem with speaking truth to power. Lastly, TK believes that the only way to confront power is by utilizing the gifts God endowed us all with to create power of our own. Then, we can enjoy real societal transformation.





with  
DeCedrick  
Walker

# Here's A Thought



I have always imagined that time spent on a particular skill humbles itself to a sense of expertise. Yet, as a soon to be 45-year old Master of Arts degree recipient on May 31st, I have had to cede to the tradition that living remains an unmastered skill. Living, it seems, will continue to exist beyond the divine decree established by God in eternity past concerning how long I should wear this tent. A hard truth is, living cannot be manipulated; we cannot arbitrarily reshape a reality that's logically inconsistent with lived patterns of love and common decency. Living, in many ways, decides how history is told. In fact, living describes all of my actions, whether good or bad, through the arc of history for the sole purpose of being an example mostly of what not to do, only some of 'I could have done that better', and an iota of I absolutely did the right thing.

I feel like my pursuit of a higher education irrespective of a specific university was the absolute right thing to do, especially when I consider the ill-advised steps and actions I undertook in the years prior to Jesus saving my soul. Even after Jesus grabbed my attention, I wrestled with what it meant to attempt living without violence being a tool to motivate peace. God knows how many times I have imagined violence necessary when I encountered odious characters disguised as conveyors of standards like masculinity, godliness, the pinnacle of intelligence... Even so, the grace of God has been such that I didn't have to use the tool of violence largely because of the encouragement I was blessed to receive and apply from genuine mentors. These mentors, while they sought to hold me accountable, themselves remained accountable to the very standards they measured myself and others by.

On the flip side, the grace of God was such that those I had angered or offended since Jesus got my attention didn't go upside my head though I had certainly given them reason to. I often find it secretly hilarious that we, incarcerated individuals, are incapable of imagining that our individuality—though impressive in some instances—isn't what's keeping people from doing us harm. My safety as an incarcerated person depends on whether my neighbor—cell mate or other individuals assigned to the gallery or tier I occupy—finds the nonviolent approach beneficial. To those that could have harmed me but for whatever reason did not or could not especially during my spiritual and collegiate journey, I'm grateful for your restraint and patience. I understand that I am difficult; I don't mean to be difficult, and yet, I am not absolved from how I've made you feel. To you I express my deepest apologies and gratitude.

My pursuit of a higher education couldn't be realized had it not been for Michelle Clifton and Vickie Reddy. There's something to be said about how different core values of a journey look at the beginning as opposed to how they look at the end. I often wonder (1) whether I still possess the values I started my journey in this program with given the illusion that my mere involvement in certain spaces offered me a path to academic prestige, and (2) whether the loss of leaders was impetus to social rebranding more kin to the oppressor than God's instruments of liberation. To answer the first question, my goal entering this program in Fall 2019 was to be educated. That I did. What I want to expose in the second question is that I cannot in good conscience measure associated sin against my experience of acting sinfully. Quite frankly, it pales in comparison. It remains an utter wonder to me that expressions can push leaders out of what they started and grew, instead of bringing them closer, though we claim to be bearers of God's image.

That said, I don't believe I would have enjoyed my collegiate journey had I not been challenged and instructed by Professor Armida to be gracious to Christian thought leaders and authors of books I have written papers on. A fatal flaw in some of our collective incarcerated thought is that we think ideally about our morals and act less than ideally in practicing them. Also, I do not believe I would have taken developing as a writer

seriously had Professor Melissa not encouraged me to write. I believe the whole of Cohort 2 is indebted to Professor Melissa's commitment to nurturing our writing community. Professor Kim Schiller remains etched in my mind as an exceptionally skilled disarmer of jerks and one of the best humans I have had the pleasure of meeting and conversing with Professor Pierre, Professor Sandra, soon to be Dr. Dodson, and Phil Jackson in their own ways made learning a joy for me. Thank you all.

Finally, I appreciate classmates like Robert John, Steven Ramirez, Sherron, Elton, Larry, and Vega, who were committed to learn, be held (and hold people) accountable, and who adjusted their dispositions and actions for the benefit of the whole. I especially appreciate and deeply respect both Mike Jones and Thomas Mills for taking the responsibility for Otha and Ananyah making it to school — pushing their wheelchairs through rain, sleet, and snow. Also shout out to Eric for finding a way to help Edward-El get his papers done. To all my “friends” who love to tout how much of A writer I “only” am... yeah, my sentiments exactly. To the alumni who took an interest in helping myself and other members of my cohort see the value in our MA, specifically Tall Mike, thank you. I appreciate and celebrate you. Pawn to king four!



## *Wisdom Blvd.* *By Mishunda Davis-Brown*



Silent Night, Holy Light

Clueless as a bug I continue to fly towards the street light,  
Only to be burned by its heat, is it really worth the sacrifice,  
How can something so amazing be so hazardous my mind can't comprehend,  
Maybe if I fly towards it in another direction I'll make it safely on the other end,  
Mesmerized as a moth to a flame without enough sense to fear,  
A brightness so alluring it's a must that I get near,  
Something so captivating just has to be worth getting close to,  
So again in denial I begin to fly in hopes of one day reaching you,  
I've heard of other bugs who got too close and paid the ultimate price,  
But I must see for myself even if it cost me my life, dismissing all signs and ignoring the heat I continue to fly,  
Thinking once I go beyond the light I'll understand why,  
Why you shine so bright yet hot as coals I must know,  
There's no way I can rest until I understand this glow,  
As I continue ahead you're not as hot and I begin to lose sight,  
It's dark so it must be night at least I reached my destination and completed my flight,  
But why do I feel so numb I look around to see,  
That I'm surrounded by dead bugs who consumed themselves  
by you, like Me.

## THE HUDDLE

March Madness By Mr. ESPN - Lonnie Smith



For the first time in March Madness history, there wasn't a single 1 seed in the Elite Eight. The Final Four had three schools that made their first appearances in one. How did we get here? Why did it happen? Did we like it? This year the NCAA didn't have one great team, which opened the door for this unprecedented time in history where a school like SDST made it to the National Championship and had a chance to win it all. John Wooden must have been rolling over in his grave when it looked like it might have been a Miami versus SDST final. When I saw Alabama as a 1 seed, I wouldn't have picked them to win the championship game unless Nick Sabou was coaching on the bench. This year, the smack talking wasn't there between bracket holders. Neither were the mathematic calculations of our moron friends and coworkers that always think they are going to win. The fun of March Madness is filling out the bracket, finding the 12 seed over 5 seed upsets, and coming out the first two rounds ahead. Then it is entering into the land of possibilities that you can win key match ups while keeping your fingers crossed during the final four. This is March Madness! Satisfied or not, I was happy to see the Big East team win because the Big East had the best talent this year. UCON's record looked like a 4 seed, but they played like a 1 seed. They blew out everybody by double digits — great job Huskies! Yet, I feel that real March Madness happened in the women's NCAA tournament. That was exciting, and LSU made the world put some respect on their names. Thus, girls balled out!!!





## Combat Corner The Veteran Voices of Stateville



Today as I send out my prayers and blessings to everyone, I would like to bring to the forefront an issue I hold dear to my heart. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or P.T.S.D., is something that many people struggle with and the symptoms most often go unnoticed. Recently I had learned about one of my cousins who had come home from the war and could not deal with the demons that followed him home. Billy Cook suffered from severe PTSD and stuck a gun to his temple and pulled the trigger, ending his pain and his own life. Many times War Veterans do not get the proper help they need, and their mental health issues go unrecognized. So I would like to dedicate this Veteran Voices of Stateville to all the men and women who suffer from this nightmare and to those who lost their lives because they simply could not get the help they desperately needed. Just like many other soldiers returning home from war, Billy Cook had earned many medals, including the Medal of Honor. These brave veterans come home and take their own lives because they cannot escape the war demons still trapped inside their heads. Please, I encourage you to stand up with the Veterans here at Stateville as we remember those who suffer from PTSD. Take Care and God bless you all.

Sincerely, **Jamie Lee Thomasson**, United States Naval Veteran



Psst! It's PTSD! By **Demetrice "D.C." Crite**

As Jamie told the memory awakening story of his cousin's recent suicide, I did my best to compose myself. The room was filled with a group of military veterans, all incarcerated. I wondered if any of them felt the same mental uneasiness as I did. My senses overwhelmed me. My eyes welled up with tears. My heart raced. I perspired. The memories were all too real and close to home. Jamie's cousin and I shared something. We are veterans and like many other military veterans, we had untreated PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Unfortunately, we are not alone. Many of the men and women that are serving or who have served our country are not diagnosed, go untreated, and for some of us our only forms of treatment are drugs, alcohol, and in Jamie's cousin's case, suicide. I was discharged from service in 1993, sent back to civilian life with a 00214 (honorable discharge), my final paycheck a pat on the back, and a "good luck" wish.

I did realize that I was also carrying with me, in my psychological rucksack, the nightmares, the intrusions, the hiding, the doubts, the confusion, the self-blame, and suicidal ideations. When all these things followed, of course, I never got any kind of help, any kind of therapy. I never told anyone. I chose to live like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs, avoiding crowds, becoming involved in heated moments — hyper aggressive.

In 1998, I landed in prison. My location in society changed, but my unknown, undiagnosed mental health problem didn't; I began to worsen. I found myself becoming more standoffish and aggressive. My short-tempered nature FORCED me to seek mental health assistance. It was then when I was finally diagnosed with PTSD. The diagnosis explained my anxiety, depression, and tears of agony that I would cry at night while trying to fall asleep. I have never told anyone, but I also contemplated suicide on a few occasions. I was afraid. I believe that that's what stopped me. I'm getting better now. I've learned better ways of coping and telling my story helps me to help others — not just veterans, but many others that have survived traumatizing experiences.

This is my story. It's no different than some that I've heard and read about from other veterans. I see that what we go through is for the course where mental health treatment for service members and ex-service members is concerned. We are then revered for our service, but we are almost never asked how we are. The violent remnants of our years of service often remain overlooked, swept under a lumpy rug along with other problems that the veterans administration chooses to hide and unfortunately, they are written off as anger issues or lack of coping skills. I served; I developed PTSD. Not enough pages in the world can describe what it did to me. The whole planet could be my inkstand and it still wouldn't be enough. My trauma cracked the planet off me in half, threw me completely out of the orbit into the lightless regions of space where life was nearly impossible to live. I've spent more energy running from my problem than I did living. I lost weeks, I lost months, I lost years. Then I faced my fears. I took off my mask of strength. Trauma is stronger than any mask; it can be buried, and it can't be killed. It's the revenant that won't stop, the ghost that's always coming for you. I used to run from it, like death itself was chasing me. I was afraid. I'm still afraid but I speak at about PTSD anyway, because as Audre Lorde has taught me my silence will not protect me. Nor will it help me.

As I write this, a combat veteran lies in a hospital bed fighting for his life. He is a member of the Stateville veterans' group. He's expressed his battles with PTSD to us. We know his struggles. Veterans face many obstacles when we are released from service. We go through our issues and often are silent about them, carrying our own burdens. We experience many quiet pensive moments. During these moments, I urge you to listen to your body, mind and spirit. It may be loudly whispering, "Psst! It's PTSD!"

-Written in the memory of: Brandon Chittum- warrior and Fallen soldier





**Editor's Note:** These self-care tips were created and published as a handout by Logan SRA students in the Spring 2022 WRIT2100 Tutor Training Class: Jami Anderson, Leanne Childs, Wendy Denzler, Karin Hargrave, Tasha Kennedy, Karen McCarron, and Cayla Wheeler,

1. Write it down! Make a list of important upcoming assignments and due dates and keep them in a place you can refer to regularly such as a calendar, agenda, or day planner. Check in with your list regularly and feel the “joy of crossing a thing off” when you finish something.

2. Separate the longer-term from the short-term/daily. Try making a daily “To Do” list and enjoy the visual conformation that you are progressing as you work through that list. Add the things you don’t get done one day to the next day’s list, and don’t feel too bad about that. Compare these short-term lists to your longer-term tasks (such as assignments with specific due dates on a syllabus). Break down your long-term tasks (such as a major final paper) into shorter-term tasks (such as choosing a topic, reading and annotating to find content, sitting down to complete a draft).



3. Practice self love. Speak kindly to yourself; talk nice to yourself the same way you probably talk to others. See if your resource room, library, or a peer has a book on self-love such as the Self Love Workbook, Radical Self Love, or The Self Love Experiment you can borrow to read up on other ways you can practice loving on yourself.

4. Practice journaling. Make a habit of gifting yourself time regularly to free write in a private journal, even if it is just for 10 minutes per day. Write about whatever is taking your attention in the moment; you don’t have to share these thoughts with anyone, and you don’t even have to reread what you write if you don’t want to.

5. Meditate. You don’t have to be an expert or have a lot of time to practice meditation. To meditate can simply mean to plan time aside where you can focus on the present — how you are feeling and what you are thinking in the moment of now. Choose a short amount of time to focus; a few minutes is fine. Sit or recline comfortably, close your eyes if that helps, focus on your breathing and how you feel in your body.

6. Go for a walk. Take regular breaks from reading, writing, and studying to walk around.

7. Spend time in the sunlight. Find a place to stand or sit in the sun even if you don’t get outside. Soak in some vitamin D.

8. Be intentional about balance. Not every assignment can be completed in one sitting, or even in a 24-hour period. Ask yourself to fill in the blank to this sentence: “I can complete this assignment in \_\_\_\_\_ days” and then block off time in your schedule to complete specific parts of the assignment.

9. Reward yourself when you finish something. Give yourself kudos and congrats. Reward yourself with an activity or treat you enjoy. You did it; go you!

10. Don’t forget to eat and sleep. Please remember that your body runs on food and sleep as fuel. Eating and sleeping are essential steps in progressing as a student, and staying alive.



# Poetry and Art Corner



Art by Ernesto Valle

Art by Ernesto Valle

Graduation Commencement, Lamentation

By Antonio "Slim" Balderas

For North Park

For North Park and people all across the world who SACRIFICE for the poor and incarcerated, I will give my all...

For North Park I will strive to be that change in the world, THAT makes a difference in someone else's life...

For North Park I will always speak out against any FORM of racism anywhere it takes place.

For North Park I will condemn materialism.

For North Park I condemn systemic capitalism.

For North Park I will look racial inequality in the eye BUT not allow it to enter into my mind's eye!

For North Park I will stamp out all forms of sexism.

For North Park I will view all of humanity as being part of the human race and not as part of a separate race.

For North Park I will always create a fair space, to use for all of us to be able to recognize our gifts and talents as we grow as a people...



Lil' Fellas by Steven Ramirez

Pandemic tested, Exegesis invested, Hermeneutics never to be rested, and Pedagogy strong - tackling the walls of Traditions. **Dsylexia** and all, we broke down stereotyped walls! Through trials and tribulations, we demonstrated our desires to succeed. WHO WE ARE, NOT WHO WE WERE, should be very clear and relieve People's fear. Now viewed as Academic Scholars, just as we perceived, a task well worth having Achieved.

**WE ARE NPTS/SRA, 2023 MACM/RA GRADUATES!**

**ARYULES "YILLIE" BIVENS**



### Graduation Song by Ryan Miller

(verse 1) D.O.C. New Jim Crow adding injury to insult  
Life w/no parole whoa that's death row de facto  
as death throes crescendo look in my soul's broken windows  
before you condemn me though walk a green mile in my insoles  
no you couldn't fit your feet inside of my size  
survive these penitentiary and gridiron confines  
Neighborhoods like war zones w/battlefield landmines  
areas underfunded that school to prison pipeline  
system is a scam this whole outfit is a set up  
in Juvenile detention hands cuffed up & celled up  
I was in my prison blue state jumpsuit get up  
before my brain's frontal lobe was even fully developed  
eastward of Eden garden skin mark of Cain lesion scarred it  
on margins we've been discarded terrain underneath vs. hardened  
rights, freedoms, & dreams of ours behemoth the beast devoured  
swallowed by the shadows we're consumed by the darkness

(Verse 2) On society's periphery Golgotha Gethsemane  
In maximum security held hostage in custody  
Gehenna hell captivity exhausted all remedies  
demons at our jugulars w/cutlery its ugly  
as the lightning flashes as the thunder crashes  
darkness it eclipses as the time elapses  
even though we're captive we galvanize the masses  
balm in Gilead we're the beauty for these ashes  
no metaphor symbolism the cure for recidivism  
elixir for syndrome symptoms we're serum the antivenom  
theorem the algorithm to breach repair chasm schism  
prayin' so hard for the youth our hands got arthritis rheumatism  
overturn our sentences restore us to citizens  
inject into the populace the vaccine inoculant  
we stand upon the precipice of freedom deliverance  
Mount Zion's on the horizon this the anthem for the exodus

(Verse 3) As I let this pain leak through razor wire chain link  
daybreak runs streak erase the opaque bleak  
the gray dissipates evaporates all the concrete  
we can't be contained no the heavens we sky scape  
our future's been foretold it is written behold  
we tearin' down this system every brick & stone  
all demonic architecture infrastructure stronghold  
we command every pharaoh - "Let my people go!"  
outspoken the awoken the frontline we forward motion  
the fire in our bone marrow's magma molten  
heartbroken tears could farm & create an ocean  
couldn't show anymore emotion than my chest I ripped it open  
inhabit all our praises laments Halleluyahs  
anoint us w/your Pneuma & ordain this movement  
the new upper room Pentecost Azusa  
all of heaven is descending like paratroopers  
let justice roll down like a mighty stream  
he chains are breaking & unfastening  
the roar of the waters is deafening  
& all the doors to the prison are opening  
assemble the ecclesia the gospel choir  
believers freedom fighters we will conquer triumph  
to the edifice of prejudice the walls of bias  
that all divide us - we cry - "Fan Goliath!"



(chorus) No we are not what you presuppose  
from the depths of Sheol we have arose  
Avengers Justice League Superheroes  
w/A Fire in our bones we cannot withhold  
As we stand here today in Graduation Robes  
Receive our degrees & diploma scrolls  
We did this all w/life without parole  
Just imagine what we'd accomplish if we all went home -



**Cool Lil' Fella  
by Steven Ramirez**

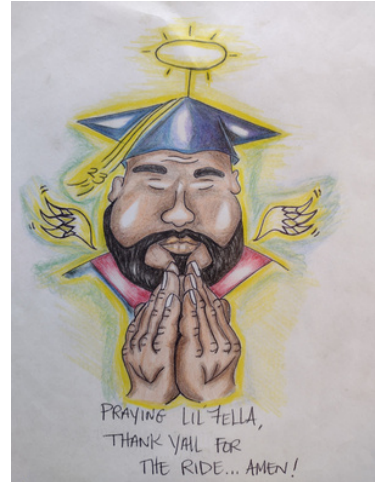


**More Lil' Fellas  
by Steven Ramirez**

Be Black!

**By Vaughn "P/Nut" Washington**

Tell me my brother how black do I got to be?  
You, keep telling me that I ain't free  
Until I get on that ship  
For Afrika, so that I can dig my roots,  
And be at peace with my soul, and practice my old  
Tradition without Mr. Charlie  
Breathing down my neck, and  
Me wondering where my next check  
will come from, but what the heck  
Am I gonna do? Learn to speak Bantu  
And Swahili, wear a Dashiki and  
Live off the land, and marry as many women  
As I can? Then will I be black enough to  
Be a real African brother, wear French braids  
drink gator aid and watch Yo, MTV Raps?  
Be pro black, what does that mean?  
And why are you putting  
money in that cigarette machine  
Is that good or bad for the Negro?



### Quote of the Issue by Officer Mota



# FEATURED VOICES: Writing Advisor Corner

## Collaboration

A Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Course  
WRIT 2100 SPRING 2023  
NORTH PARK UNIVERSITY  
By Kenneth Key

There are many different views, approaches and conclusions related to collaborative learning.

The fact that many enter into conversations on this topic proves how important the topic of collaboration is and has become over time. In my era of schooling, during the mid-fifties through the early seventies, collaboration in my opinion wasn't a novel idea. Collaboration has always existed, but in my past, it hadn't been defined as such.

When I read Andrea Lunsford's article "Collaboration, Control and the Idea of a Writing Center," one type of writing center she mentioned catered towards information depositing or, as stated, "The center as storehouse operates as [an] information station or store house, prescribing and handing out skills and strategies to individualized learners" (Lunsford 93). Her other position is that "Building a collaborative environment is also hard because getting groups of any kind going is hard" (Lunsford 95). The last thing that would stand out would be how her research showed the benefits of collaboration, after first stating all the potential harm, from the potential threat to her teaching, in what she calls the "center Garret," and how such centers perpetuate "this American brand of Individualism" (Lunsford 93) and how one center differs from another Garret center in the type of knowledge.

I disagree with Lunsford when she relates the difficulty and innovation in getting people to collaborate together. Over the years, as early as 1976, before I had any knowledge of Lunsford's idea of "collaborating," this could be exactly what we were doing at a newly created Stateville Legal Aid Council-(SLAC). This would be an idea generated, mind you on the yards of Stateville Correctional Center. As we sat at tables, on the ground or walking in groups around the track, all this was occurring by me and other convicts. Even before '76 there were cons who would talk among themselves on how they would better serve the community of prisoners in the early stages of legal work, even before the SLAC, in collaboration ideas.

At that time, you would find me daily at the Law Library, where I worked with a group of jail house lawyers conversing, now coined "collaboration." We reviewed and prepared various templates of motions, form letters, and the list goes on, to help those now in custody coming to Stateville navigate the legal process without a lawyer. There was no word that existed in any of our vocabulary such as Lunsford's to document our conversation or meetings as collaborative learning, but we did have the kind of "Storehouse Center" that Lunsford writes about. Our storehouses were the elders of the prison, who taught us on the yards, in the classrooms and dining rooms of the prison; they were the encyclopedias. Unlike Lunsford, there were no problems with forming groups of eager students to learn.

Just like Alicia Brazeau who offers us another opinion, having worked as a consultant both with individuals and with groups and "explored how student preference for individual group tutoring might affect their experience with consultants" (285) in her article "Groupies and Singletons; Student Preference in Classroom-based Writing Consulting," we conversed with individuals and in group settings. Just as there were 28 students, five consultants who were in the lab, and there were group leaders in Brazeau's article, we were elder cons versed in the law sitting and teaching the law on the yard to those who wanted to learn rather than play. This carried on in the library in groups and one on one. We would, in these collaborations, come to a general consensus about certain issues such as what language should look like in order to express its intent with supporting legal actions. This was always our approach in our collaborating.

Are rules needed when groups are collaborating? Of course there are. For our rules, we would simply talk over each other. Is there a type of democracy that depends on what is to be born out of a collaboration and says it is a group project? Yes. But if we are students conversing about an assignment, then the nature of that work becomes collaborative. Therefore, for those who engage and collectively form opinions based on the pros and cons of the data generated by information, or given by a school mate, one must agree that those conclusions are born out of collaboration, conversation.



# FEATURED VOICES: Writing Advisor Corner

(By **Kenneth Key**, continued...)

In the free world setting, collaborations are going on out at recess, walking together, on the buses home and even in the text messages. The sharing of information has become common place, and collaboration is certainly at the center of it. Information is then generated and reformulated, despite it being shared collaboratively, yet everyone can still have a different perspective on what has been discussed. We see collaborations going on as college students discuss and prep for debate clubs, the theory of chess being studied, or simply within almost anything else.

If I and a few people from a particular class are sitting and discussing a prompt for an essay we've been given and one or two are taking notes and the other are simply recording theirs in their memory, and we come to some of the same fundamental conclusions about an issue, question and so on, we have just been involved in a collaboration. Whereafter, we each go to our respected place of dwelling and write a paper. These papers are each uniquely our own, born out of conversation, but now in our own words, reflective of our individual voices and yet all distinctly different; that's collaboration to its core. Lunsford has her opinion and Brazeau has hers, but at the core of all the approaches, where concepts of conversation are applied to tutoring of groups and or individuals, collaboration is the application used.

4/24/2023

## COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PRISON STYLE

Submitted by Aryules "Yillie" Bivens

### SHOCKER ALERT! COLLABORATIVE LEARNING HAPPENS IN PRISONS!

Most people in the general public do not know that prisons had held the title of or were termed as "a college." This is factual because the learning that Prisoners acquired was obtained through collaborative learning. As a Prisoner in the Illinois Department of Corrections for the past forty years, I can attest to this fact affirmatively. Collaboration in the sense of fellow Prisoners, called "long-timers," whom education came from being self-taught by reading and studying of many books; in all areas of life, science, religion, and fiction. Then teaching the new Prisoners and/or short-timers about these areas of knowledge which long-timers had acquired. But this collaboration was not always in the form of Higher Education. Usually, to reach a short-timer, long-timers had to meet the short-timers at their level of interests. By finding some commonalities helped put short-timers at ease and open to learning, thereby developing a relaxed knowledge sharing atmosphere. In this type of collaborative learning, the Tutors were out in the prison's settings, i.e., yards, gym, law-library, etc., encouraging the growth and development of a short-timer or a new Prisoner. This answers the question of, "How does any Tutor or Writing Center acquire the attention of Tutees or Students?" Thus, **SHOCKER ALERT!** Yes! Even in a Prison's environment collaborative learning is taking place!

### What is collaborative learning? And what does it look like in prison?

Consider the long-timer as being the tutor and the short-timer or new prisoner, being the tutees. They are "Peers" in the sense that they are both

## FEATURED VOICES: Writing Advisor Corner

Prisoners. Recalling what Kenneth A. Bruffee says about "Normal Discourse (329)" "Peer tutoring, again like collaborative learning in general, plays an important role in education because it provides a particular kind of social context for conversation, a particular kind of community; that of status equals, or peers." (329) I say this because in a prison's setting long-timers are looked at as experienced knowledgeable individuals, who can identify with the younger less experienced prisoners as just being a prisoner. This makes them equal peers in the social context, in the prison kind of community, which opens the door for conversation, between the two.

Collaborative learning is then, "the sharing of knowledge between individuals," in direct social exchange with other people, through conversation or writing & reading, that cultivates a type or kind of thinking that is generally accepted in the community. I gather this meaning from "Peer Tutoring and the conversation of mankind" Kenneth A. Bruffee, (326-328).

Collaborative learning in a school setting functions the same way, with perhaps more individuals involved in the conversation adding more personal knowledge and different life experiences. Thus, increasing the amount of knowledge that is being shared; Because that knowledge that is being conversed is knowledge that is accepted by the class-room, general community. In this case the general community is the prison's individuals in custody and Professors who are civilians. which is **Shocking to the general public**, to realize that prisoners have access to writing centers and Professors; who are much needed resources for tutoring in general also to make prisoners better writers.

But not surprising, here in Stateville Prison, this grouping of shared knowledge between College students and GED students functions well. Perhaps because of the relationship of "Tutor-Student." But even the meetings with the College Students who seeks help with their writing ,( at the level they are at) are encouraging to them to think a little broader than what they may have already written down. Learning through shared experiences or even sharing personal experiences from different cultural backgrounds helps facilitate a better collaborative learning group or one-on-one session. In the one-on-one sessions, it

is the conversations between the two that creates a relaxed atmosphere and creates a trusting rapport for learning to be received. Also, both individuals will listen intently to each other and learn new ways to improve their writings .

I can recall one of my experiences while in Pontiac Correctional Center. I was tasked with tutoring a student who did not have his GED, but wanted to obtain one. He was not open at first to traditional ways of teaching. But each time we got together, in the evening times, and in the school building. He talked about sports with great delight. So, I joined him and then starting asking how was he able to come up with all the stats of the players. I asked him if he could show me how to understand it. Once he became comfortable with me, we established a rapport of teaching and learning from me became easier for him.





# FEATURED VOICES: Writing Advisor Corner

However, Andrea Lunsford urges caution in using collaboration as the idea of the kind of writing center she advocated for. Saying: "Collaborative environments and tasks must demand collaboration. Students, tutors, teachers must really need one another to carry out common goals." (95) This is not a problem when it comes to Writing Centers in Prisons, the need to learn more to have a voice that is heard and articulate effectively are things for all individuals involved need one another to carry out. This common goal to be better writers are also goals that are clearly defined, in which the jobs at hand engages everyone fairly equally, as is another issue of caution Lunsford mentioned. (95)

I most certainly, would be honored to join the staff of any writing center, as a Tutor or Teacher! Moreso any writing center in prison, such as here in Stateville Correctional Center, where "such an environment rejects traditional hierarchies."

## CONCLUSION

In his article "A Writing Center in Prison: The Value of Collaborative Learning" Benny Rios, North Park Theology Seminary Master Graduate, stated: "Universities have a long history with writing centers, whereas the history of writing centers in prisons is a new concept." But the idea of and implementation of the Writing Center here in Stateville Correctional Center and Logan Women's Correctional

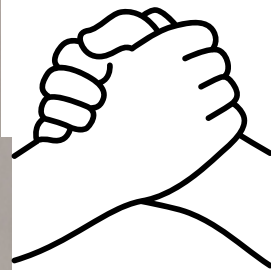
Center, was thinking outside the traditional pedagogy of learning for all people. Although it has its obstacles, so far overcome, I look forward to more positive growth of new ideas and tutor-students-Professors relationships that creates better writers not just better writing.

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Lunsford, Andrea. "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." The Writing Center Journal, vol. 12, no 1, 1999, pp.95.

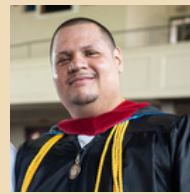
Rio, Benny. Tutors' Column : "A Writing Center in Prison: The Value of Collaborative Learning" WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER, 2020.





# THE AMPLIFIER

with Alex Negrón



Robert Maury's essay on theory and theoretically based inquiry in writing tutoring is a great piece! I would argue that it has the potential to be published in a writing journal with a few revisions and some expanded thoughts. When it comes to writing an essay in the realm of academia, a great Introduction is what is needed to draw your audience in. Introductory paragraphs provide readers with the the first impression of your paper. Robert does a great job of drawing his audience in with introducing us to the "A-Team" and connecting it to different theories of writing to equip tutors with concepts to help make better writers.

An Introduction should have 3 elements. The first is to open up with a hook/attention grabber. "The plan coming together" said by Hannibal is this essay's hook. The second is narrowing down the topic and providing an overview of what you will discuss. The last element is stating your thesis. For all of you new essay writers, Robert does an awesome job of informing us of all different conceptual theories that can be applied when it comes to tutoring writers. This essay starts with his great Intro! -Alex N.

## **FINAL ESSAY FOR WRIT2100: Introduction to Writing Center Studies** **by Robert Maury**

On the popular television show: "The A-Team," there is a character named Hannibal. As the leader of the A-Team, Hannibal is responsible for orchestrating the 'plan.' Whenever the 'plan' is successful, Hannibal always says his catch phrase, "I love it when a plan comes together." I could borrow Hannibal's catch phrase to highlight the unorthodox success of this essay coming together with the other components of this assignment. To that point, I'm reviewing the article in the *Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* called "Looking through Lenses: Theoretically Based Inquiry" by Lauren Fitzgerald and Melissa lanetta (pages 201-221).

As it turns out, the focus of the article, and the questions we are asked to answer within our essay by our writing professor, all lined up as if I 'planned' the alignment. I chose the primary article because of its relevance to the Writing Center in terms of advancing the center's "phronesis" or practical wisdom. It is this practical understanding and knowledge that allows us to understand the use of theory as lens, when it comes to convincing other readers or advancing the scholarly conversation concerning a particular subject, and that same understanding will inform us that a "lens can be used to compare and contrast methodologies; explain theories; develop better understandings of a wide range of topics, or argue for a particular set of values" (Fitzgerald and lanetta 215-217).

However, let's start from the beginning - what is a theory? Theory (as defined by Webster's College Dictionary) is "a particular conception or view of something to be done or of the method of doing it" (1384). More of a "Writing Center" definition can be found in the *Oxford Guide*: "An abstract conceptual lens that can be applied to a variety of occasions to foreground certain dynamics as a means of better understanding a given situation" (Fitzgerald and lanetta 213). Now, that's a definition formed on a solid foundation of Phronesis, where as a tutor, writer, and thinker, I must always "pursue the four characteristics thereof: (1) an understanding of both self and others (Wisdom), (2) expertise in tutoring (Knowledge), (3) a commitment to learning (Virtue), an understanding of how to act to effectively pursue educational goals (Decorum)" (Fitzgerald and lanetta 210). A thorough understanding in the use and functions of theories will go a long way in establishing such an understanding.

To highlight some of the effective ways theories are used, I'll call into service a well-known (to Writing Advisors, at least) article that is argued through the use of theories: "Postcolonialism, Acculturation, and the Writing Center" by Jeff Reger. This article is an excellent choice because theories are used in several different ways: "(1) to explain a particular course of action, (2) provide a framework that allows a particular practice to be presented in an intelligent and widely understood way, and (3) the most common use of theories is to compare two or more things (practices, points of view, methods of achieving a goal)" (215-216).

Let's look briefly at a couple of these elements for the benefit of clarity through the use of abstraction. As we consider the first method of how theory can be used to explain a particular course of action, we see that right at the beginning of Reger's article, a didactic tension is established through the theory and lens of postcolonialism with an imperialistic theory and lens in contrast. Stated more dramatically, a tension is developed in determining whether or not it is more beneficial for a student-writer to maintain their sense of custom and identity while attempting to acclimate to a new discourse-or, should the student-writer abandon their culture and identity and assume a new discourse and identity...

Reger's most influential theoretical lens comes in the form of an article written by Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski entitled, "Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center." The pedagogical conception of a writing center presented by Stephen M. North could be construed to embrace the second element of the uses of theory: provide the framework that allows a particular practice to be presented in an intelligent and widely understood fashion. In the article "The Idea of a Writing Center," North held it axiomatic that the function of a writing center is to make "better writers, not better writing" (237). This is in direct theoretical opposition to the lens used by Reger- to wit: Bawarshi and Pelkowski's "Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center," but the point here is how the lens is used to explain (in layperson's terms) the (obvious) difference between Reger's "Postcolonialism, Acculturation, and the Writing Center" ( 499) and North's "The Idea of a Writing Center" (237).

Bawarshi and Pelkowski's writings utilized by Regar as lens were instrumental in the development of "Critical Consciousness," but to develop a complete understanding and concept of postcolonialism, several other concepts were integrated and used to develop the framework of postcolonialism, some of which I will briefly mention here: (1) Gloria Anzaldua's "New Mestiza Consciousness" developed in her book *Borderlands: La Frontera and the New Mestiza* (Reger 500), (2) "contact zones" (by Mary Louise Pratt in her book *Arts of the Contact Zones*, and (3) "safe houses" by Brook Baker in *Safe Houses and Contact Zones: Reconsidering the Basic Writing Tutorial* (Reger 500). These lenses not only help to sharpen our understanding of postcolonial theory, contact zones, safe houses, and critical/mestiza consciousness, they form the very fabric of our relationships with other Writing Advisors, students, and the Writing Center itself-through the four principals of Phronesis, and (I must admit) through a little self-interest of being the best WA (Writing Advisor) I can be.

With other Writing Advisors, we can bond in the common knowledge of knowing that as a matter of expertise, we provide the most compassionate and intellectually current assistance that is available through North Park, not only to people we know within our community but also because we have a Writing Director that stays current on all the procedures and advancements in the Writing Academy, so we are vicariously connected to people of all walks of life including mentors, peers, alumni, university staff, and faculty.

With other students, we pride ourselves with being able to provide both peer-to-peer and collaborative (group) assistance. As Writing Advisors steeped in Phronesis (Practical Wisdom), we consider it our obligation to be, if not versed, at least aware of Centripetal theories—assisting those students that experience less ambivalence when approached through lessons and understandings we have in common—allowing us to explore different learning strategies and pedagogies. In contrast, we also recognize Centrifugal theories—accepting those students that see each writer as an individual celebrated in difference (Fitzgerald and lanetta 29).

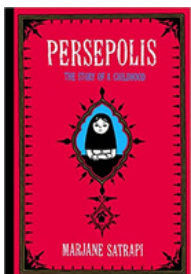
Indeed, the Writing Center and those that teach, instruct, collaborate, act as peers, and those that learn from our experience all benefit from knowledgeable peers and tutors—that's just a fundamental theory of operation...In closing, I would endeavor to say: this essay (in its entirety) has been my humble attempt to substantiate the Lauren Fitzgerald and Melissa lanetta definition of theory as "an abstract conceptual lens that can be applied to a variety of occasions to foreground certain dynamics as a means of better understanding a given situation (213).



By Wendy Denzler

## BOOK REVIEW

Satrapi, Marjane. [Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood](#). Paris: Pantheon Books, 2003. ISBN 978-0-375- 71457-3



This one is way different than most of the books I read. It's a comic book (graphic novel), but what a story! This is the autobiography of Marjane Satrapi, starting at age 10 and going till she's 14. It's her childhood perspective of war, revolution, & social change in her girlhood home of Iran during the 1980's. You see her child's mind try to understand all these very adult concepts while still retaining her childlike innocence. Just an absolutely stunning story!

## By Officer Montgomery



### View of a Non-believer

The topic of this article will pertain to the theme of this issue of *Feather Bricks*, which is perseverance, struggle, hope, transformation, and what justice looks like. My own fitness journey includes all of these elements. When I think of where I started, at 260 lbs (all fat) and why (failing marriage), my successes and goal achievements are some of my proudest accomplishments.

Fitness is all about mental strength and perseverance. You have to be willing to do what it takes to overcome your subconscious mind. Your subconscious mind is what controls things like your heartbeat, metabolism, breathing, and emotions like fear. Fear affects you when starting something new, how much pain you are willing to go through, and long term planning. If you conquer your fears, half of the work is done. All that's left is the conscious day to day decisions you make to implement your plan.

Self evaluation is an under rated piece of the puzzle. You have to humbly judge yourself in order to start a proper plan for your particular needs. Your plan has to be something that you will be able to commit to, even when it's not fun or exciting. You have to start with the understanding that most people fail at what you're trying to do. In order to succeed, you have to consider yourself different from average.

You have to be able to ignore the temptations of life that will get in the way of your goals. The average person can't do that over a long enough period of time. You have to know that it will not be easy or comfortable. As a matter of fact, you have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. A good thing to tell yourself when you want to give up is, "If it was easy then everybody could do it."

These are some of my fitness accomplishments:

3-time Mr. Chicago

3-time Mr. Illinois

2nd place Masters Mr. Universe

3rd place Masters Mr. Olympia

And 1st places in several other smaller competitions



## From Paper Gowns to Cap and Gown

### By Yarmale Thomas

I want whoever reads this to think about this for a moment: I spent my first 8 years of incarceration in the psych ward (2 1/2 years in 2 North, 2 South, and RTU while awaiting trial at Cook County Jail and 5 1/2 years at Dixon psych X-house. I've been stripped of my clothes and dignity and strapped down to a metal frame, wearing a paper gown. I've ben on suicide watch multiple times over the years 9the longest was 30 days without a mattress, clothes, shoes, and without a roll of toilet paper nor a spork to eat with). I didn't talk to anyone for 13 years, not individuals in custody, staff, or my family. Most people believed that I was deaf, dumb, crazy, or all of the above. There was a long stretch of time in my life prior incarceration and while I've been incarcerated that I truly believed that death had to be easier than what I was dealing with mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and at times physically. But God had a different plan and has the final word. Today as I write this, I'm preparing for graduation from North Park Seminary with a Master of Arts degree in Restorative Justice Ministry. God has blessed me to throw away that paper gown while on suicide watch and put on my cap and gown to walk across the stage with my brothers, in front of family, friends, staff, and people supporting me while I receive my degree. Always remember that God is truly good and knows the end from the very beginning...look at my life! Jesus is Real ! :-)





## Celebrating Mothers. by Janis Elmore, Law Librarian



Name one of the most important people in your life. Unanimously, one is our mother. Have you ever thought about what exactly makes a person a mother? There's giving birth to a baby, of course, but that's not the only way! When you think of "mother," you might also picture a stepmom or foster mom. You might think of the mom who adopted you. Maybe your mind goes to another family member or adult who takes care of you. Whoever your mother is, be sure to show them appreciation as often as you can!

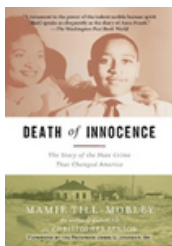


Have you ever wondered how "Mother's Day" became a holiday? The idea started in America when a woman called Anna Jarvis campaigned to make Mother's Day a recognized holiday after the death of her mother Ann Reeves Jarvis. Her mother had been a peace activist who cared for wounded soldiers on both sides of the American Civil War and created Mother's Day Work Clubs to address public health issues. On May 12, 1907, Anna Jarvis held a small memorial service for her mother's efforts on the anniversary of her death, which started her to campaign to make Mother's Day a recognized holiday in the United States.

Because of her efforts, most places in America were observing the day, and in 1914, Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation designating Mother's Day, held on the second Sunday in May, as a national holiday to honor mothers.

Many children believe they have the greatest mom in the world. Mothers are known for their unconditional love, care, and protection. Some are known for the cookies they bake or the important jobs they do. Moms are special in so many ways. All mothers, wives, grandmothers, and stepmothers have played a major role in raising children. Think of those single mothers who work outside the home to provide for their families or those mothers who take care of their elderly parents or sick family members. What about those mothers who have remained strong no matter how hard it is to lose a child or spouse? What about those mothers who have left a legacy behind that reminds us how special their lives were to them?

For example, throughout her life, Mamie Till sought justice for her son. Her work proved crucial to the increasing civil rights movement. It also inspired the Emmett Till Anti-lynching Act (2022), which made lynching a hate crime.



Viola Davis is also widely recognized for her advocacy and support of human rights and equal rights for women and women of color.

In the book, *The Last Painting of Sara De Vos*, the main character, Sara de Vos, is the first woman to be admitted as a master to the Guild of St. Luke in Holland. Sara existed during a time when such famous artists as Rembrandt and Vermeer flourished. Sara De Vos is a fictional character shaped from a blend of known women painters from the Dutch Golden Age.

Booker T. Washington says it so beautifully; "If I have done anything in life worth attention, I feel sure that I inherited the disposition from my mother." Remember this as you think about your mom or those mother figures in your life as this special day approaches, Mother's Day.

Way to GO Graduates!



# Shout Outs

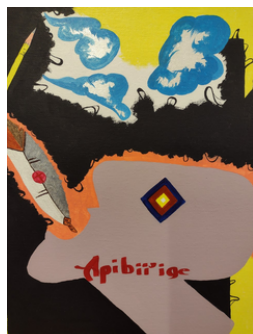
## Congrats to NPEP Playwrights for their performance at the Goodman Theatre!

List of Plays & Participating Playwrights:

- “Addicted Personalities” by Les Carroll
- “Ain’t No Stoppin’ Us Now” by James Soto
- “Ain’t Nothing Like Quality Time” by Taurean Decatur
- “Almost Sixteen” by Robert Cloutier
- “Bail Money” by Benard McKinley
- “Brotherly Love” by Shareaf R. Fleming
- “Comic Books and Candy” by Antonio McDowell
- “Hidden Passion” by Robert Boyd
- “Me and Kovolo” by Corzell Cole
- “Parameters of Closeness” by Andre Patterson
- “Paroled” by Anthony Ehlers
- “Project Window” by Michael Broadway
- “Saying Goodbye” by D.C. Crite
- “Shakedown” by Abdul-Malik Muhammad
- “Stranger” by William Peeples
- “Sunshine” by Todd Mandoline
- “The Love Gift” by Lynn Green
- “The Prayer” by Justin Cavazos
- “The Spark” by Craig Harvey
- “You Deserve” by Tony Triplett
- “Walking a Mile” in Her Shoes by Tyrone Daniels

**The Pauline corpus calls us to give thanks for all...  
and in all (Eph 5:20,1-Thess 5:18), and I want to  
thank each and every one of you in my SRA Cohort  
for always making this liminal mestizo feel like part  
of the body. As a First Nations tribal member I  
honor you by saying  
Gigii-minochigen! – Ojibwe  
Gdewigés – Potawatomi  
Yoyáne – Oneida  
Wašurapi – Ito Chunk  
Kenāēheqtamuaw – Menominee  
Wulakuniimeew – Munsee  
Meaning “Congratulations  
and job well done!”**

**-Marshall Stewart  
(Anishinaabe)**



## STATEVILLE VOICES



Originally developed with incarcerated students at the Stateville Correctional Facility in a playwriting class taught by Goodman Artistic Associate Rebecca Gilman, through the Northwestern Prison Education Program.

### ABOUT NORTHWESTERN'S PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM (NPEP):

The Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) is an initiative of Northwestern University to provide a high-quality liberal arts education to incarcerated students in Illinois in partnership with Oakton Community College and the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). NPEP fills a vital need by being the only degree-granting program in the state providing a full liberal arts curriculum—humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and STEM courses—to incarcerated students. NPEP accepts applications from facilities throughout the state, including from medium- and maximum-security prisons, enabling it to have statewide impact and to reach students at various stages of their incarceration. The liberal arts degrees conferred by NPEP prepare students for success across a broad range of future pursuits and add value to the lives of both the students and their teachers.

Director: **Spenser Davis**

Artistic Associate/Playwriting Instructor: **Rebecca Gilman**

Director of the Northwestern Prison Education Program: **Jennifer Lackey**

Line Producers: **Rachael Jimenez and Lena Romano**

Casting: **Rachael Jimenez, CSA**

Production Assistant: **Caroline Uy**

THEATRE  
**GOODMAN**

Congratulations to the class of 2023! God bless you for your faith and hard work. May you continue to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2).

–Rev. Dennis R. Edwards, PhD  
Seminary Dean  
North Park Theological Seminary

Loud, enthusiastic, and joyful shout-out to all of this year's graduates, and an extra "woo hoo" for my writing partner (you know who you are!). Congratulations all!  
Nancy Arnesen, (Professor of English, North Park University)

Dear SRA Stateville Cohort, 2 Graduates,

We are so proud of you for your outstanding achievement to graduate in this SRA master's degree after a very hard work. Receiving this desirable diploma is the fruit of your effort and hard academic work. We are honored to celebrate graduation day with you. I am looking forward to being with you and witness this memorable accomplishment with you and your families. **-Professor Eugenio Restrepo, Pastoral Care and Counseling, NPTS**

During my tenure as Assistant Director of the SRA Writing Center, I have worked intimately with the SRA Class of 2023, many of whom are Writing Advisors. I have personally witnessed the hard work, perseverance, and dedication displayed by these men on countless occasions. However, it is beyond the classroom, study hall, and writing center settings where I have had the most impactful interactions. It is where I have sought and found support, council, and fellowship. It is also where I have developed some lifelong friendships. As an alumni, I am proud to congratulate my brothers on their graduation. Job well done! **-Rayon Sampson**

### **From One Alum to Another by Scott Moore**

On June 5, 2022, I stood inside the theater building at Stateville Correctional Center clad in full regalia alongside 31 other free and incarcerated students who made up the first graduating class in IDOC history to earn a Master's Degree. There, in the sweltering heat among family, friends, and distinguished guests, I vividly remember anxiously awaiting the moment when I would walk across the stage to receive my diploma-the culmination of a four year journey filled with hard work and perseverance in the midst of heartache and pain. However, while myself and the rest of Cohort 1 were celebrating the end of this stage in our journey together, what really stood out to me on that hot summer day was the enthusiasm and support coming from another group of students in attendance: a group of students about to embark on a final year of a transformative journey all their own: Cohort 2.

Fast forward one year later, and it is now time for their enthusiasm and support to come full circle. On May 31, Cohort 2 will stride across that same stage to have their names read aloud and their Master's degrees conferred as a job well done. On behalf of Cohort 1, I would like to take the opportunity to celebrate these graduates for their academic achievements and unprecedented accomplishments.

Congratulations, Class of 2023! You did it! Against all odds, you've earned a Master's degree from behind steel bars and concrete walls that seek to deny educational liberation and reinforce systemic injustice. Your journey has truly been a testament to God's grace and the transformative power that knowledge provides. What's more, you've proven that it's possible for incarcerated individuals to reach back into the traumatic past, reshape the tumultuous present, and create hope for a triumphant future. Not only have you stood on the foundational ministry of those who come before you, but you've also created new ways of being restored through the process of helping to restore others. By pioneering the love and dedication that discipleship requires, you've established an academic scholarship fund where marginalized students can H.E.A.L. through higher education. You've moved from classroom theory to real world application. In building a much-needed financial literacy module for free and incarcerated people alike, and because you have a desire to effect positive change in society by interrupting the vicious cycles of addiction and violence, you've put together multiple mentorship programs that transform at risk youth and the communities from which they come. In other words, you are giving hope to others where it has never existed before.

From one Alum of NPTS to (almost) another, I salute each and every member of Cohort 2 on your groundbreaking achievements and accomplishments. While certainly not without its trials and tribulations, your academic odyssey has shown that it is possible for us to transcend the vicissitudes of life so that we may stand united in the mutual pursuit of liberation and justice for ALL. Your perseverance and success will undoubtedly stand as a shining beacon of hope for all those who seek to follow in your footsteps. Well done and God bless!



# Shout Outs

## Lewis University Prison Education Program Members Say:

- \*WOW! Congratulations to each and every one of you. I know it's been a long journey and you deserve a lot of credit! May each of you find your calling! -Alex
- \*Thanks for being an example of excellence and perseverence. -Devon
- \*Congrats all you guys. You are inspiration to me to continue my goal of getting a degree. Keep up the good work. -John
- \*All of you are bright beaming, shining lights of hope for all prisoners. Congrats and thank you for lighting the path. -Dameion
- \*Congratulations to you all for your personal achievements, and thank you for your help in advancing opportunities for prisoner education. We look forward to putting our hands to the work of liberation. -Garry
- \*Gratitude for embodying proper education, as it always corrects errors. Your experience is exemplary of there being no progress without struggle, and faith without works is dead. Our liberation is bound in one another. -Sidney
- \*What you all have accomplished is truly inspiring. Thank you for sharing your gifts. - Svondo
- \*I salute you Brothers for completing the pilgrimage of Graduating from North Park as a Restorative Arts graduate. Yall are motivation and inspiration. Congratulation!!! I'm looking forward to seeing your work. -Ron
- \*That's what's up Fellas keep up the Good work. -Kyle S.
- \*I heard Prof. Tony Pizarro share with his students the following quote by Nietzsche: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." Food for thought. -Mike Simmons
- \*You all are the inspiration! I truly appreciate and admire what you all have accomplished. Know that you're not just representing yourself by obtaining your degree. You are all representing all of us! Thank you. Davondros Q. James
- \*Congrats guys!!! Keep setting goals and continue to make your loved ones proud.

CONGRATS for completing a special 8-week Math workshop facilitated by Teaching Fellow **Manuel Metlock** with an assist from Cohort 2 graduate **Sherron "Cicero Sosa" Dillon** for Ms. Johnson's students at Stateville: Rodney Love, Anthony Powell, Travoy Williams, Tommie Harris, Ras Green, Luis Mendez, Milton Wardlaw, Francisco Gonzalez, Adam Titus, Lorell Johnson, Demario Thompson, Diansio Wilkerson, Henry Davis, Eric Carson!

KUDOS to Kijel Grant and Victor Bandola for receiving their GED certificates!

**The Writing Center sends special shout outs to all Writing Advisors who have been turning in drop-in slips. Congrats to Marshall Stewart (Stateville campus) for submitting the highest number of drop-in slips this spring semester!**

Extra-Mile Awards go to (1) Cohort 2 Graduate and Writing Advisor **Robert Maury** and (2) TA, SRA Student, and Human Extraordinaire **Cheyenne Johnson** for their positivity and productivity this semester.

As always, *Feather Bricks* is grateful for the support from **EFA Baez** and **Sgt. Brown** in the education building at Stateville and all of their staff, including, but certainly not limited to, **Ms. McGrath** for copyediting and **Ms. Johnson** for being a Math champion.



# Shout Outs

"I hope you feel joy and pride as you reflect on the academic journey you have recently completed. It was a long road and thankfully one taken with others. So, always remember that to be loved, strong, and interdependent is the beauty of humanity." -WA Acacia

"Cohort 2,

I am so proud of you all! You have worked hard and accomplished something amazing. It's been such an honor attending class with you and working alongside you. I am blessed to call you colleagues and friends! Way to go!!!"

Cheyenne

"Congratulations on your accomplishments and the hard work you put in to succeed. Always have faith and confidence in your abilities to persevere and to finish. Again, congratulations to all the graduates and the ones to come." - WA AB

"Class of 2023: You are now the light bearers for those who seek liberation through education." -Antonio Pizarro

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Congratulations to my brothers earning a Master's degree from behind the wall. May this be a first step in an amazing, God-honoring life." -Todd Smith

"Congratulations to all the students graduating, you are the answer to your ancestor prayers. You have and are altering the course of the generations to come with the knowledge you have attained. My only challenge to you is to keep living what you have learned and to share that knowledge to all. To the history making SRA MACM/MARJMSRA keep living in the Impossible." -YA BOY Pastor Phil

Congrats  
to all involved in  
Cohort 2's HEAL  
program!



North Park Theological Seminary School of Restorative Arts' 2023 graduating class has created a mentoring and college scholarship program for youth. Combining the power of their faith the application of their education, incarcerated scholars provide recipients mentorship, encouragement, and access to an accepting college of their choice through their Higher Education Ameliorates Lives (H.E.A.L.) program. This program is designed to positively transform hearts, minds, and hands that harmed into hands that heal.

This program is being launched in partnership with North Park Covenant Church, and we are still in the innovation and creation phase so keep checking back here for more updates as they come.

Donations can be made by using the church's giving portal. Currently, we are unable to give a charitable donation giving receipt for tax deduction purposes, but all giving will go entirely to the H.E.A.L. scholarship fund with no overhead costs. To give, click the button below, enter your amounts and personal information, and make sure to select "SRA Heal Scholarship" in the fund drop down box.

Editors' Note: Outside readers can find an electronic version of this issue (and past issues) of *Feather Bricks* on North Park University Writing Center's website:

<https://www.northpark.edu/academics/undergraduate-programs/academic-assistance/writing-center/>





## Class of 2023 Most Likely to Succeed

