

Cover Art by Kyle R. Starks

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Peace and grace to all the men and women in the I.D.O.C., as well as to all of our families and friends. I've been enjoying reading all of y'all's' words in previous editions. Continue to find ways to exercise your rhetorical agency, and in so doing, take control of your own ongoing stories. Write on!

Since my transfer to Sheridan, I've had the privilege to work and learn as a Teaching Fellow for Lewis University. Big ups to Fella, Quan, and THE SQUAD! Different site; same fight: liberation (physical, psychological, and emotional). Quan often reminds us that our liberation is tied up in each others'. This, of course, is not only applicable to Lewis students and faculty, but to all inside and out who resist commodification and dehumanization via education and awareness. It applies to EVERY person, no matter what level of education you're currently at. It applies to those fortunate enough to find healthy ways to cope with human caging, as well as to those who've yet to discover better ways to fight. Our liberation is indeed tied up in one another's. Each of us are integral parts of the whole effort in the struggle against injustice any and everywhere. Just doing my part. HE>i . -Mike Simmons

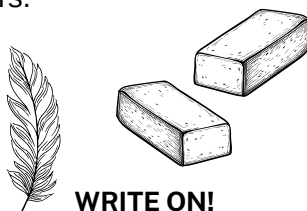
Thanks Mission Control, that's a great and inclusive way to get the people ready. Your approach to the work is always authentic and positive, and we indeed benefit from your textured experience...it is much appreciated! But now, let me address the passengers.

What's up out there y'all? This is Fella, your pilot speaking, and on behalf of the first cohort of Lewis University Flyers ("The Squad"), I welcome you to join our flight to freedom and beyond. In this special edition of *Feather Bricks*, we hope to entertain you with a showcase of works from the minds of a share of Sheridan's awesome artists (like my classmate Kyle) and wonderful writers (like me! Okay, okay...and others! 😊 )

In addition, we will also include writing and practical advice, some food for thought, and a little humor that you may use to maintain your altitude, or rise to new heights. So fasten your seatbelts. Prepare for takeoff. And above all, enjoy your flight...It's First Class!

But first...shout outs to Uncle "P-Nut" (Vaughn Washington) and my brothers Rayon Sampson, Zôhariel (Alonzo McCorkle), and Shakur (Patrick Comi)...Peace! Mad love! Much respect! To freedom and Beyond y'all!!  
Now, a few words from my co-pilot...King Quan, take 'em to the bridge!

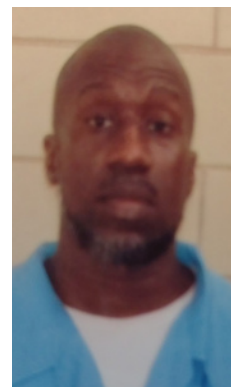
Peace to the people! I am grateful to have the opportunity to build with Prof. Mike and "Fella" Garry in co-editing this issue of *Feather Bricks*. The theme of parts to a whole, individuals in community, stemmed from reflection on the universal law of interdependency and interbeing. On this flight 'our liberation is bound up in one another.' Shout out to our Intellectual Globe Trotter. For me this issue is space for elevated minds to contribute to our upliftment. Everyone has something to offer. This experience we are enduring is a cocoon for us to come out and elevate above the vulnerabilities we dwelled in ignorantly. Overshadowing that ignorance of the law is no excuse. Now is our chance to play our role in the rebuilding, healing, and restoration of our communities and homes. In this terminal, the entry/exit signs say "Know Thyself." Words from the wise: Proper Education Always Corrects Errors.



WRITE ON!



Michael Simmons



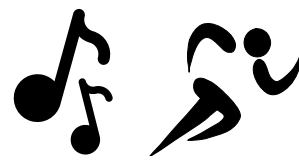
Garry Thompson



Sidney "Quan" Butler



## PARTS TO A WHOLE by **EFA ERIC BELTRAN**



Greetings all! As I was approached to do this edition's column, I was excited to do it when I heard the theme was "Parts of a Whole". This theme is very appropriate to who I am! Actually, it's the many parts that make me who I have become. As I reflected on this theme, I realize that I was so fortunate and blessed to have been taught by the LaSallian Christian Brothers at St. Joseph High School. The very same Christian Brothers that sponsor Lewis University! It was these Christian Brothers who encouraged us to develop as many different skill sets as we could. I recall specifically, Brother Peter Hannon who was our U.S. History teacher, but also my soccer coach, a boxer, a world traveler, and a photographer. It was through these examples where we thought, "WOW! Those guys do more than one thing!" I'm sure at some point in your life you may have said to yourself, "...I can't do that. I don't know how.", or "...I don't know how to do anything else.", or "...I'm not doing that. It's not me...". In Corrections, there are many opportunities where you can venture out of your comfort zone and try something where you may find some hidden talent. Don't be afraid to try something new. Add more "tools" to your "toolbox" of skills. You may find your purpose. Know this, EVERYONE has a purpose. Now finding what that purpose is can be the challenging bit. But the point is to take advantage of the opportunities you have! Get your GED. Learn about Horticulture, Welding, Plumbing, or Culinary Arts. The more you do and learn, you may be inspiring those around you to do what you're doing! Think of yourself like the sunshine. Flowers grow towards the sunshine. Every time you learn a new skill, it's like a new ray of sunlight. All those rays of sun you develop eventually make you a new and better person.

As you learn more skills, each skill becomes one part of who you are becoming. One of the most valuable lessons I have learned from the Christian Brothers was that no matter how old you are, you never stop learning. The more you learn the more you grow. The more you grow, you will develop a sense of self-value so that you can utilize these new skills on the outside and become a productive influence in your community. What is past is past. Now is the time to look forward. Visualize what it is you want to be. Create goals for yourself. Then work hard to make those goals reality. This is the essence of the Mission of the LaSallian Christian Brothers. To provide an education to all regardless of your lot in life, or economic background. The Mission is to find those wayward souls and help a person find their way. The Christian Brothers showed us we were more than we thought we were. Just because we are good at one thing doesn't make us whole. They would see things in us we didn't see in ourselves and cultivated those hidden gifts. The Christian Brothers did for me and all the young people who have been fortunate to grace the halls of any Christian Brother school. Christian Brother products such as NBA Hall of Famer Isaiah Thomas, Actor Steve Harris who was a standout athlete but later found his passion as an actor in "The Practice" and "Chicago PD", my esteemed classmate Pastor William Gates who was the subject of the documentary Hoop Dreams, and Eric Beltran the EFA of Sheridan Correctional Center.

I am the PROUD EFA of Sheridan Corrections. I am also a musician, athlete, writer, composer, photographer, audiofile that loves to listen to all types of music from the symphonies of Mozart and Mahler to the classic heavy metal albums of Motorhead and Metallica and Broadway musicals. I am an avid reader, history buff, and enthusiastic learner on all things. All these parts make me who I am. Find those parts that make you who you are and use those parts to make a difference in the world. And as the Christian Brothers end every prayer to "Live Jesus in our Hearts...FOREVER!"



**Assistant Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy, Lewis University**

This past summer, I taught an introduction to philosophy class called "Philosophy for Self Care" for the Flyers at Sheridan. We used philosophical ideas throughout history and across the globe to understand better what it means to be human and how to care for every part of our being: mind, body, soul, environment, community, and more. Well, when the class was over, the Flyers wanted MORE. Together, we've started a chapter of the Lewis University Philosophy Club on the Sheridan campus. We meet a couple times a month to continue examining our lives and our beliefs, learning about other ways of thinking, and using philosophical thinking to make sense of our experiences. We've read several philosophers who wrote meditations—deep explorations of their own ideas about existence, selfhood, and the nature of the universe. I invite you to enjoy Svondo's philosophical meditation on spirit animals, identity, and belonging as part of a community.

**Welcome to the Philosophy Club by Svondo Watson**

The body is often viewed as a spiritual idea: an idea manifested in form and endowed with the faculty of reason. This spiritual idea, or creative force of energy, flows through and connects each and every one of us to the gift of life through all its forms of expression. In other words, life's presence is ubiquitous in nature. It is in the air we breathe, the soil we use to grow vegetation, the fire that regenerates, and it is in the water that sustains us. This creative force of energy, or spirit, does not waste anything as the body returns to the earth and the spirit journeys onward.

The indigenous people of North and South America embraced this spirit, and embedded in the philosophical foundation is the notion of self and how this form of expression is connected to the essence, or spirit, of an animal. Although I was familiar with the term "spirit animal," I never gave it much thought until my classmate Panch gave a presentation concerning the matter. For class participation and entertainment purposes, Panch invited us on this journey of self-discovery. The goal was for each individual to call out the name of the animal that in some way aligned with certain aspects of their personality. There was a vulture, unicorn, fox, owl, and bear on location. The second wave unleashed the rooster, lion, dragon, mustang, rhinoceros, and German Shepherd. Next was the hyena, turtle, cheetah, black panther, dire wolf, king crab, and scorpion. Believe it or not, the cuttlefish and hermit crab even graced us with their presence. Although the unveiling of our spirit animals in class was very entertaining, it is quite different than the practices of indigenous people of North and South America. For example, it was customary for the Paiute (paī-yūt) or indigenous people originally from the territories now known as Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and California to use hallucinogenic cactus plants for unveiling, communing, and travelling of their spirit animals. This bond was believed to be one of their connections to the spirit world. Imagine that!

Thanks for inviting your classmates and Professors on this journey, Panch. On the one hand, you gave me a cool way to break the ice and engage in entertaining conversations with others. For example, Professor Melissa and Professor Michelle stopped by my job assignment in dietary for the purpose of returning some important paperwork to me, and also to discuss the upcoming Fall and Spring semester classes. Unbeknownst to my professors, my discussion of academics had reached its conclusion, as I stealthily posed the question to Professor Melissa, "What is the name of your spirit animal?" I said, "I am a lion and Professor Michelle is a mustang."

"I don't have a spirit animal name." Professor Melissa stated, "Svondo, perhaps you could write an essay and create one for me." In fact, she continued, "You can use three animals and present your essay in front of the class and let them vote on which one they like the most. I'll make a note of it," Professor Melissa stated, "so I will not forget."

My eyes lit up with excitement, as I smiled gracefully, saying, "No problem, Professor Melissa. I'll be ready for class Tuesday." However, in my mind I thought, "WHAT THE \*?!k JUST HAPPENED?" I know this lady didn't just give me a prompt for an assignment. In the back of my mind, I could hear my classmate Fella laughing hysterically as he said, "You see, I told yo' ass every time you open yo' mouth it turns into an assignment." I just want to state for the record that it is kind of annoying when Fella is right.

When I think of Professor Melissa's spirit animal, I think of Aqua-Woman, disguised as a jaguar, who is wearing the cloak of a koala. Aqua is a light greenish blue color that represents both land and sea.



# Parts to a Whole

“Welcome to the Philosophy Club” by **Svondo Watson** (cont...)

The land represents the word made manifest, and the sea represents the depth and power of those words. It is through Aqua-Woman’s words and the ability to express herself in the form of writing that allows her to be free. Through this freedom grows the passion to teach and help liberate others. As for the jaguar, she hunts intelligently, using her speed and agility. Her black spotted skin serves as camouflage to protect her from predators and lay traps for prey. At night she waits patiently for the right moment to strike, just like Professor Melissa did in the Officers’ Dining Room when she gave me this damn assignment. Nevertheless, at day break, the rays of the sun cloak her in the garb of the koala, who sits peacefully nestled in the tree eating eucalyptus leaves.

In closing, I say to my beloved sisters and brothers that Professor Melissa is not only our teacher, but our sister as well. Let us embrace her as such by naming her spirit animal, “so that she may board this plane and take flight,” as my classmate Quan would say. Professor Melissa Jaguar aka Aqua-Woman, welcome to the Philosophy Club.

Dear Readers,

Hello, my name is **Dahvie Holmes**, and I’m writing about my current and life-long role I serve in regard to my family and community. Growing up I was taught each one, teach one. With that being said, I am the oldest brother to 6 siblings, but at the same time a younger brother to my big sister. I’m an uncle as well, with a handful of nieces and nephews, all who are growing up in a world that I’m unfamiliar with due to my 9 years I’ve been incarcerated, and with 11 years remaining on my sentence, I can only be a voice of reasoning and logic. I help by using my knowledge and wisdom I’ve obtained throughout my life as an extra perspective for my siblings as they navigate their lives. We think together about the effects our actions cause not only ourselves, but others as well. I express to them to remain mindful of others’ causes and effects because they can affect them because we are all connected.

Guidance is extremely essential. I’m in my predicament due to a lack of guidance, so I took to the streets which led me down a path of destruction. I refuse to have lived the life I live just for my lil’ brother or nephew to follow behind my exact mistakes. I refuse to allow the same game I ran on girls growing up to be ran on my lil’ sisters or nieces. Everything happens for a reason. I left the streets at 20 years young. I like to use my life as a blueprint of what not to do. And, luckily for me, they are all receptive to my advice and we have open discussions all the time.

Also, I’m installing strong characteristics by testing them with different responsibilities! I hope then they will hold their friends to the same standards I hold them to because we are all connected, and each one, teach one can and will slowly but surely change the world from one family to another, one community at a time.

Thanks for reading. Peace!

## “Find your Peace” by **Gabriel Ortiz**

“The mosaic of life”: most of us have heard the expression, but what does it mean to you? Mosaic is a term used for a bunch of little different parts being used to make a singular bigger thing. The beauty of it is that when you zoom out you get the “big picture,” and when zoomed in you get an individual story. I think most of us are either one of two things. We are either happy with who we are or where we are, but not both. We might find peace in our situation but aren’t happy in it-or with it. Communities are a good example of that concept. We can “zoom in” at inner cities and see nothing but crime, not realizing the people there are just a product of their environment. At the same time, we can look at affluent communities and we see a different world. The grass seems greener, the air seems cleaner, and the sun seems to shine brighter. Both places reflect people in their community. Looking at it that way, we are too “zoomed in” to those small images in this bigger picture we call life. We need to “zoom out” and see that we are part of something bigger. We need to figure out who we want to be in this “mosaic.” We are a reflection of our environment, so what part do we want to play? I hope to bring clean air, greener grass, and brighter light wherever I go. My community is not bound by a neighborhood or city line. Remember, find your peace in your situation, but also figure out what piece you want to be in your community. Be the individual change so when people “zoom out” they can see that you helped build a bigger, brighter, more beautiful Mosaic.



In August of 1992, I walked into the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center for the first time. I entered with my guitar and a whole lot of curiosity. I'd been asked to provide music for a weekly Catholic Mass held on Saturday afternoons in the "Audy Home." The friend who invited me to come in to sing and play guitar stated that maybe I could provide music 'once in a while.' Ah, the irony! I sang with my inside younger brothers and sisters every week for 16 years.

For the first year of going inside, I went only on Saturdays for Mass, but eventually, I felt called to do more. I began going in once a week in the evening as well to hang out with whomever needed a listening ear or a comforting prayer. My mentor throughout my time at the Audy Home was Fr. Dave Kelly, whom many of you know. I'm so grateful to him for consistently reminding me and other volunteers that the most important aspect of our ministry was "presence." Numerous times, those I had the privilege to accompany thanked me because, in their words, I was the first person who ever truly listened to them. I can only imagine how these adolescents must have felt as they went through awaiting trial, the separation from their loved ones; the fear and anxiety must have been intense, even if they were often really good at hiding it.

The transformation that all of this began to evoke in me is multi-faceted. Because I was listening intently during our visits, my prayers with them at the conclusion of a visit became very Spirit-led. In other words, I got out of the way and allowed God to guide me. The Spirit helped me to embody the compassion I felt and articulate the solidarity I was there to offer.

For about a year and a half (December 2006-June 2008), I worked for the Kolbe House Jail Ministry just two blocks north of the adult Cook County Jail. I sang with the adults detained there and led community services several times a week. It was during this time that I met a bunch of the men who continue to correspond with my students through the Faith Behind Bars project. It has been an honor to be able to remain connected to people who came to mean so much to me. As a side note, I also attained my Doctor of Ministry degree in 2007, so slowly but surely, important pieces of the puzzle were falling into place.

For a variety of reasons, in 2008 my ministry inside the Audy Home and my work as a member of the Kolbe House Jail Ministry team came to an end. I was in a pretty major life transition at the time and had already started teaching at Lewis University off and on. One of the brothers I met while ministering in Cook County Jail helped me to think through what it would mean to connect my Lewis students with people serving time through correspondence. It was in 2009 that the class and project Faith Behind Bars was born. I was still only temporary at Lewis, so the class was offered on a trial basis.

Happily, it went amazingly well. Students were transformed by the experiences they had, and people inside were asking for more. Some of you told me that this undertaking was cathartic, therapeutic and fulfilling. I know many incarcerated individuals became important mentors in my young students' lives, and several have remained in touch for years. It has been humbling to facilitate this process year after year and see all the cool ways that the Spirit is at work in the relationships that unfold in the messaging process.

Faith Behind Bars became an official theology course offering in 2014 with the name Practicing Faithful Justice. Since 2015, I have offered the course every semester. Some who are reading this now have been on this journey with me for the long haul. I am incredibly grateful for all of the fruitful partnerships that have taken root over time.

A lot has changed since 2009 when I first tried this new idea for a class as an adjunct professor. For instance, in 2022, I became Chair of the Theology Department. I've created a lot of initiatives at Lewis since I became full-time in 2011, and even before that as a half-time Coordinator of Service Learning (but that's a story for another article). Frankly, I often have a hard time keeping up with my own ideas, but I'm determined to keep on keepin' on, because we have a lot of work to do. Just rest assured that there are a lot of us in the world who are working beside you for freedom, abolition of toxic systems, and the enlightenment of people who don't yet know much about the prison industrial complex or the women and men trapped within it. Don't you worry; I, for one, am still walking! Thanks for showing me the way and walking beside me.



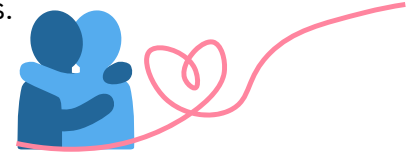
In my mind's eye I can see a black slave absorbing the concept of imago dei. I can imagine a creature that has been misused and abused from the moment he or she entered the world; and then reading that they also were created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). This was something that was suspected all along in this individual's spirit. This was confirmation of the revelation: everybody is somebody. Human beings can be beaten down to the point of extinction, yet they will still rise up and proclaim their humanity because the "God particle" exists in us all. The great Apache chief Geronimo said I cannot think that we are useless or God would not have created us.

All through history there has been some groups that have tried to claim humanity just for themselves. They have tried to portray themselves as the only people made in the image of God. But this lie is impossible to maintain because God's truth is inside of all of us. We are, in the sight of God, one community. No matter what we may call ourselves or where we may live, we all belong to God, and God values each of us equally.

This is evident in chapter 9 of Genesis. Before humankind invented labels to distinguish themselves one from another, God proclaimed in this verse that "Whose sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God he was made" (Gen 9:6 KJV). It is not easy to see the image of God in everyone you meet, but there was a time when I did not know there was such an image. Now, I feel that this knowledge has made me responsible for seeking that image in those that I encounter. This communal feeling that we are one humanity cannot be denied.

As for my part in the community I would like to identify myself with Mr. Foss' poem, "A House by the side of the Road." I can only remember one stanza which goes something like this: let me live in my house by the side of the road, where the race of men go by. Some men good and some men bad as good or as bad as I. I would not sit in the scorner's seat nor hunt the cynic's band, just live in my house by the side of the road and be a friend of man. By Sam Walter Foss.

## Can a Once Fragmented People Be a Part of the Whole? By Nacho



"Parts to a whole"--when I think about this prompt I'm constantly reminded of Jesus' ministry that often sought to make people from all walks of life whole. This means that Jesus dealt with the "underbelly" of society, the broken and fractured individuals relegated to the shadows of a predominately marginalized community. It was these nameless, faceless, and voiceless vessels; the margin of the margin, that would most readily come into the light of Jesus presence in order to listen, embrace, and accept not only this teachings, but also his healing, deliverance and salvation. These encounters with the truth would release a virtue that would restore not only health, but status as well. You see, these fractured and broken people were parts to a whole, but unfortunately their condition disqualified them from participating in the whole of community. They were ostracized and bound to the shadows by the religious policies and practices that governed the societal consciousness of their times.

These policies or plans of action which were strictly adhered to by religious practitioners, because they were the holders of them, didn't take into consideration the humanity that was before them and in a state of flux and deep suffering. Well, that's not exactly true, the consideration was present, but only in the sense of putting these "incomplete" people in their proper and respective place: the outskirts. These rigid practitioners, representatives of the kingdom, were not concerned with any type of restorative practices. They had a one-track mindset on punitive actions which did not line up with the Father's heart, mind, and will for these people. These practitioners were bound by the letter of the law and not the spirit of it. This is important to understand because the letter kills, destroys, separates, and dis-embodies, while the spirit gives life or quickens, enlivens, revitalizes and reanimates that which has died or fallen into a state of decay or disrepair (II Cor.3:6). So, based on this, the handlers of the letter were separatists who were not concerned with building a holistic community, but rather with keeping things and people in their place; they were concerned with criminalizing these individuals' condition and behaviors rather than making them whole. They were quite frankly upholders of the status quo which was antithetical to the kingdom whose objective was to disrupt and shatter the existing condition, or business as usual mindset.



# Parts to a Whole

## Can a Once Fragmented People Be a Part of the Whole? By Nacho (cont.)

Adding insult to injury, these divested parts to a whole were called to carry or wear a placard that gave notice to everyone they encountered exactly where they stood in society. They were called to carry a sign and verbally declare to all the world “unclean”. This practice reminds me of the carceral system’s ideological mindset and methodology. Why? Because once an individual comes into contact or proximity with it, they are forever displaced and also relegated to the shadows of society. Entering into this industrial behemoth renders one a second class citizen even after they’ve been released from it. It seems that they also must declare their uncleanness, but in perpetuity... so how can one divest themselves of these monikers, ideas, and labels: will society be able to see and embrace the transformative power of God within the lives of these once fractured and broken people? Or will they demand that they keep the “unclean” sign even after they’ve been made whole?

I believe that once fragmented people can once again be a part of a whole, especially when they encountered the eternal presence in very personal way. I believe that there are practitioners today that are not bound by the letter of the law, but by the spirit that redeems, restores, and makes all things whole or new. It is those that have aided in the holistic process, and it is these who can bear witness to the regenerative power of healing... it is these good Samaritans that were willing to engage the shadows and meet the broken where they were at. They were not bothered by the “unclean” placard placed upon them by society but transcended that ideological framework because they were governed and led not by policies, but by the father’s heart, mind, and will.

The question that comes to my mind is: “will you the ‘free’ and ‘clean’ society be willing to accept these individuals or parts that the transformative power of God has redeemed clean and whole?” or will you continue to ostracize them and invalidate their humanity even while upholding a faith based framework? Your answer will reveal whether you as individuals in free society are really free and whole or fractured and bound...

### The Connection to Ancestor by Tonia Jackson

The spirit of our Ancestor spoke to me and said the darkskin race is suffering because y’all believe in a doctrine which led some among you to think that they are free men and women. This is called propaganda.

This propaganda was spread so you would relax from pushing for educational accountability in each other, and equal rights as human beings.

For slavery is no longer bondage to a master’s household, slavery is now a condition of being subjected to a specialized influence.

These last 20 plus years tried to put me in a “tomb” mind set, but I had to quiet my mind and had to allow my soul to listen to the voices of my ancestor, which allowed me to elevate my consciousness to impose on the spirit of our ancestor, so I could receive guidance back to love for my people.

I was vigorous in my pursuit, and once they divulged themselves to me then I understood what big brother Malcolm X was awakened to when he was in jail. For he clearly fell in love with his own reflection which allowed him to fall back in love with those who are suffering like him. It’s a beautiful feeling like when your eyes open for the very first time and you lay eyes on your mother and know that you are safe. (Brothers & Sisters open the book and expand your minds), and let’s start back mentoring our kids, because they are our kids.



# Parts to a Whole

“Come Clean” by **Preston Gresham**

Take it from me, change can be hard. Once I came to prison, I had plenty of time to examine my past behavior and look beyond the mask I wore for so many years. Simply put, I had to come clean about the bogus way I lived and treated others, the way I made excuses, and the way I avoided responsibility. All of the so-called friends I thought I had were only people who wanted to see if I could help them get what they wanted, and once I wasn't able to help them, they disappeared.

Most of us have hopes and dreams for the future, and unless we get rid of all the distractions, we will only continue to go in circles. Look at your life and see what isn't working. What choices and decisions are you making? You may have to cut some things loose in order to accomplish your goals. Start seeking positive people to hang out with, and build a network of others who are striving to be their best. Get rid of the need for constant approval of others who don't have your best interests at heart. Also, try to look beyond these fences, and imagine what your life will look like if you choose to do the right things. I am not talking about something I don't know. I have seen firsthand how right choices can bring positive results. Give yourself a chance to live a good life on the outside. We don't have to make this place a revolving door. Remember: “Thoughts lead to choices, choices lead to decisions, decisions lead to actions.” What are you thinking? God bless!

Hi, Beloved,

As I sit here in a 6 by 9 cell, my mind goes to when I was a child...I'm going back and forth with thoughts about family and my community. I'm hoping to go back and rebuild what I helped destroy. I need everyone to think about how lovely our family is. Even on our broken pieces...Remember when it was Thanksgiving or one of our birthdays-family was there to cheer us on, the neighbors would come over and eat. The community is our family as well. We get cousins, aunts, and even uncles from our community. Today we have lost most of our community and family. We have to stop hating one another and understand family sticks together through the ups and downs. We can build our family and community back up...we have to put love where hate and unforgiveness is at!! Never forget, we must invest in our family and our community!! Let's start spending our money in our community. Invest in that building or store, allow your community to become safe and attractive-we have to talk to our family and neighbors and let them know I love you and on our block we loving one another. We have to go back and remind each other, we rode each others' bikes, I slept at your house, we grow up as family. Allow your family to become a blessing in your neighborhood!! You are your community! For me, it is on the level of helping the youth get educated and feeling loved...I can't help my family nor my community until they know I care. Other communities produce positive and productive stores and property; why can't we come together and do the same thing? Let's start making our family and community a reality. Remember, your family and community are a rare and beautiful flower. Let's work together in love and rebuild our family and community-lastly, tell your family that they are rapier and paragon. As Ever, **Moses Stamps**

“Patriarch” by **Donald “Talib” McDonald**

Being the corner stone of the unit, he is the foundation of the structure, organizing each brick, beam or glass, a direction to turn, sibling to support, helping when a footing becomes misaligned, or perch unsure, orchestrates confusion in the edifice's design. In strong gales, he is stabilizing. In floods of emotion, he brings arid solutions, and in heated flame-ups of anger, he provides composed relief. At times, wielding scripture, others, lessons of long life, often the first reared, his charges are built of wood, metals, glass, or brick, each material with its own strengths, quietly, he understands that with a loving plan, the Builder made him! The corner stone, and it is his fate to be the shelter from life's storms. He...he is the hearth of the home.



# Parts to a Whole

By Sherron “Sosa” Dillon

One of Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary definitions of community is “the people with common interests living in a particular area” (2016 p age 251). For many of us we view community as a particular block we grew up on or one of the many neighborhoods of Chicago. From our cultural norms we develop biases and prejudices that help perpetuate the dehumanization of others, thereby failing to recognize their humanity. A perfect example of this dehumanizing behavior is when over a decade ago where it was my job to cut hair as a barber of people in segregation and Protective Custody, and a gay person asked me to cut his hair and I denied him. The following week the same person asked for a haircut and again I denied him. One morning, after packing my equipment, a lieutenant stopped me and asked, “Sosa, could you please cut the guy in upper center four?” I frowned in my mind and said, “Not going to happen.” So a couple of weeks later, after finishing up cutting hair in seg, for whatever reason, count hadn’t cleared, and once again I was approached about cutting this individual’s hair, in which I decided to cut it. He looked as if he hadn’t had a haircut in a long time because of so much hair that was on his face and head. I gave him a nice haircut, but what changed me was the way he looked at himself when I handed him the mirror. It was as if he was seeing a new person. In that moment I felt really bad because, as a black person whose people had suffered over 400 years of dehumanization, I was now perpetuating that oppression. In regards to what role I would like to continue to fulfill in my community, it is simply treating people in the way God intended, no matter what identity they represent.

## Connected to the Whole by Jamal Bakr

In this community, I wear a lot of hats. Depending on what space I find myself in, I am a cook, writing advisor, tutor, recycler, teaching assistant/fellow, confidant, relationship expert (with my wife for 12 years, married for 5), counselor, mental health professional (as I am affectionately called by a couple of my coworkers at one of my two jobs), spokesperson, representative, mentor, brother, and friend. I am keenly aware of the expectations that I place on myself. More recently, I have become hyper aware of the expectations others have of me. Whenever I walk into a room, something to the effect of, “Just the person I needed to see” is said, and no matter how I am feeling, I put on a smile and the required “hat” (role).

Without employing the necessary self-care practices, constantly meeting the expectations that others have of you can become exhausting. On the outside you may keep a smile, but your personal struggles are usually tabled or completely ignored/disregarded. You don’t like letting people down, so you try to be there in whatever capacity you’re needed. Your mental health is running on fumes and one crisis can send you spiraling. You get really good at suffering in the dark. I am sure that my incarcerated community can identify with this unsustainable habituality. We want to be extraordinary humans while we face extraordinary suffering, but soon we realize that we’re just ordinary people suffering extraordinarily. A life of incarceration will reveal a spectrum of suffering.

In the beginning of this year, after two decades in prison, I was resentenced and I became eligible for review under the youth offender parole law. However, when my parole hearing was delayed and my attorney transitioned into another position, making her unable to represent me, my habit of neglecting my own mental wellness caught up with me. When I needed to be there for myself, I had nothing to give.

My community would say that I do a really good job of taking care of others, but I have to confess that I do a really bad job of taking care of myself. This was something that I had never openly admitted, but in the midst of my crisis, I realized that I needed to break my silence. About a month ago, on two separate occasions, I openly shared my struggles. The way that my community held me, with care and compassion, made me aware that I wasn’t less of an asset because I was in need. I realized that it was okay not to be okay and that a community is an incredible resource when you admit that you need help. I learned that when any individual is connected in meaningful ways to the whole, your community will respond and lift you up in meaningful ways. If you are not okay, you don’t have to suffer in silence. Even if your community can’t change your circumstances, at least we don’t have to suffer alone.

# Parts to a Whole

## **DePaul Behind the Walls (Legislative Visitors) by Alann Vega**

I never imagined I would have the opportunity to meet a legislative representative while in prison, yet on September 26, 2023, Stateville CC received not one but three legislative visitors: Senator Mary Edly-Allen, Senator Rachel Ventura, Representative Dagmara Avelar, and two staffers for Senator Laura Ellman. Alongside our legislative visitors, members from Restore Justice (RJ) Wendell and Swan blessed us with their presence as well as Shaneva McReynolds from Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM).

Surprisingly, our legislative visitors were given unlimited access to the facility and were allowed to have members of our community tag along as guides. Thus, our legislative visitors were able to witness firsthand and hear directly from our community. In doing so they learned of the facilities' problematic challenges in providing a safe and positive environment for the incarcerated community and correctional staff.

Our legislative visitors also learned of the many great things we are doing as well as the accomplishments of those within our community. As the tour began to finalize, they made it their effort to stop by DePaul Behind the Walls Civic Engagement Collaborative Think Tank in the chapel. Although surprised, we knew this was our opportunity to represent our community on those legislative issues that will allow us an opportunity—an opportunity most of us have never been given. The Earned Reentry Bill (HB3373 / SB2129), prisoners' voting rights, repealing Truth In Sentencing, and making the youth offender parole retroactive in Illinois was our agenda, and we represented well. Thus, a big shout out to everyone that represented our community on that day and continues to do so. To our outside members Carlye, Lila, Maya, Eli, Nana, Alex, Katrina, Ami, and our beloved Dr. Rivers, thank you, as nothing we do can happen without your immense support. A great acknowledgment for Joe Dole for the political fire and brimstone he never fails to bring, Raul's emotional deliverance, Benny's insight with Healing Beyond Harm, and DeCedrick's perspective in restoring prisoners' voting rights.

On a personal note, such experience taught me the importance of always being ready to speak and represent our community well. In doing so, I also realized the power of "We vs. I" as we discuss those issues that affect us all and not just me.

In closing, one of the senators asked us the following questions I encourage you to ponder on: "Why should you be released before completion of your sentence, after being convicted of a violent offence? Why should you be allowed to vote in prison?" Those were a couple of the questions our legislative visitors asked us—had you been there, what would you have answered?

Alann Vega, School of Restorative Arts and a DePaul's Inside Out Think Tank Contributor

## **Keep an Eye Out**

Voting in prison (House Bill 29-subject to change) If passed, the Voting in Prison Bill would restore voting rights to YOU-people incarcerated in Illinois prisons. Voting for elected officials is important because it's one way to hold them accountable for addressing your needs. Elected officials like mayors, state's attorneys, judges, and sheriffs are responsible for uplifting the needs of their constituents--the people who vote for them. Examples of ways your vote could impact change: 1) You vote in judicial elections and get a biased judge kicked off the bench. 2) You vote for your child's school board, who determines school lunch quality. 3) You vote for supreme court justices who make decisions about the constitutionality of laws. 4) You vote for the Governor, who determines the state budget and how much money goes to IDOC. They also appoint the director of IDOC. Voting is an important tool to create change. Send letters explaining why having the right to vote would be important to Chicago Votes 1006 S. Michigan Avenue, Ste. 606 Chicago, IL 60605





**Lewis University students at Sheridan Correctional Center completed “College Writing 1” this semester. The following texts were originally written as assignments for the course.**

### **Animals Teaching “Animals”: Rhetorical Analysis by Connor Scott**

We humans are not the only ones who inhabit this world. We share our Earth with all kinds of other living creatures and therefore will always be connected to them, for better or for worse. Joseph Dole’s “Yard Time with the Animals” and Edward Hoagland’s “The Courage of Turtles” are two articles which reinforce this thought.

In Joseph Dole’s “Yard Time with the Animals,” Dole gives an account of his interactions with various animals throughout his 16 years of imprisonment. These interactions with animals take place in four different prisons and the reader follows Dole on his journey from prison to prison, each with its own unique yard set-up and local wildlife. Dole’s craving for a pet is evident throughout his journey, but he finds since spending so much time in cages himself, he is reluctant to ever cage another living being.

In Edward Hoagland’s “The Courage of Turtles,” Hoagland shows the reader, with a few different stories, the effects of altering wildlife’s environment and removing animals from their natural habitat. Hoagland gives vivid descriptions of the fate of many turtles who never seem to have a chance to succeed but try their best anyway. Hoagland also gives detailed descriptions of these turtles and their personalities, which shows his appreciation of them. His stories show the impact humans have on the existence of turtles and how even when we humans try our best to help, we can still end up doing more harm than good.

Both articles use pathos to bring awareness to anyone who interacts with animals that there are lessons we humans can learn from them, but Dole has a stronger effect than Hoagland in using pathos because he seems sincere in his interactions with animals, while Hoagland seems almost hypocritical.

In “Yard Time with the Animals,” Dole quickly establishes credibility by explaining that he has spent the majority of his adult life in prison. While he is no wildlife expert, this leads me to believe that Dole would know better than most what happens while on the yard at maximum security prisons. Throughout his article, Dole is notably affected by the animals he interacts with. While he is incarcerated at Tamms, Dole remembers when he kept a pet turtle while at Menard and begins to feel guilty about it. “I guess I was sort of conditioned to believe that being human gave me the right to cage other living beings. Maybe we all are, and that’s why we call people who commit crimes ‘animals’—it makes it easier for us to cage them” (Dole 3). When I first read this, my initial thought was that Dole used logic to come to this conclusion. I see now that it was emotion and empathy towards these animals which led Dole to this conclusion. How often do we use the mask of logic to defend doing something which we know to be wrong?

“Yard Time with the Animals” is a powerful read due to the constant emotional connection the author maintains with the audience throughout the article. The way Dole describes the animals and the way he compassionately interacts with them made me feel like he saw himself in the animals and led me to the question: Did Dole see himself in the animals because he himself had been called an animal by the prison guards? Dole opens the article by introducing a double entendre of the words “animal” and “yard”:

“‘Animals.’ For people in prison, that single word can evoke powerful emotions. As an adjective it is often used to dehumanize us. The vast majority of society will assume you are referring to ‘criminals’ when you talk about ‘animals’ in prisons...when I think of ‘yards,’ I no longer conjure up manicured lawns with sprinklers...Now, I think of two things, concrete and animals” (Dole 1). This got me engaged and thinking. As I read, I comparatively pictured Dole’s descriptions of both types of yards. I also began to recall all the times I had heard criminals or prisoners referred to as animals. “Animals” and “yards” are two words with completely different meanings depending on which side of the fence or wall you live on.



The longest story in the article is when Dole is at yard at Tamms, which was nothing more than an enlarged bird cage. In what Dole describes as his “best experience at Tamms,” he helps to rescue three baby birds who are at the bottom of the cage with him and are trying to get to their mother, who is at the top of the cage (4). This is a difficult endeavor for Dole since the birds are still learning to fly. He is gentle and persistent and eventually reunites all three with their mother. The time Dole spent during yard trying to rescue the birds and his use of language when he writes, “exiting the yard, I smiled” gave me the impression that he found it extremely satisfying to be able to free the animals from their confinement. I think Dole pictured a part of himself flying free with them.

Throughout “The Courage of Turtles,” Hoagland gives interesting facts about turtles and other wildlife. This helped me trust that he possesses authority when it comes to knowing how certain things affect turtles and how to take care of them. “Turtles cough, burp, whistle, grunt, and hiss, and produce social judgments...They pee in fear when they are first caught, but exercise both pluck and optimism in trying to escape” (Hoagland 152). As the reader, I appreciated knowing these traits of turtles which Hoagland found ways to incorporate with humor, as they gave the turtles individual personalities and made them seem relatable.

Despite all of the affection and interest Hoagland shows towards turtles, his use of logic to look the other way at times is frustrating. At one point in his article, Hoagland visits a store which sells baby turtles which have been painted. He gives vivid descriptions of their eventual fates: “Of course, the turtles’ doom was sealed when she painted them, because their bodies inside would continue to grow but their shells would not. Gradually, invisibly, they would be crushed” (Hoagland 154). Why doesn’t Hoagland say something to the store owner? It is as if Hoagland knows he cannot save all of the turtles, so he doesn’t bother to tell the store owner that what she is doing is wrong. Maybe the store owner doesn’t know that painting the turtles kills them, and Hoagland doesn’t even try to enlighten her.

Hoagland overall does a fulfilling job of making me see and feel the struggles turtles face. Ultimately, turtles are at the mercy of humans, and I think this is the main point Hoagland is trying to make. An example of this is when Hoagland rescues a diamondback terrapin and reintroduces it back to the wild. He chooses a bad spot to release the turtle, though, as the current was too strong and this more than likely led to the turtle’s eventual death. Who was responsible for this? Even though Hoagland was trying to help and do the right thing, he ended up doing more harm than good.

In both articles the authors learn things from their interactions with animals and teach those things to the reader. Dole uses pathos to learn and teach that the use of the word “animal” is something more than just a synonym for a bird or a turtle; it is a word used to dehumanize and make ourselves feel better about caging someone. Hoagland also uses pathos to learn and teach that human interactions with turtles so far have not turned out well for the turtles. I appreciated the contrast both authors use while both use pathos effectively. Dole shows how dehumanizing humans makes it easier to mistreat them. Hoagland shows how humanizing turtles should make us care more for their struggle. Overall, I feel Dole did a better job using pathos effectively by capitalizing on teaching opportunities. Hoagland fell short in this respect but still motivates the reader not to make the same mistakes he did, and to right wrongs where the chance presents itself.

### Works Cited

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## Story: “Dialect: How Dare You!” by Rene Amigón

The date is Oct. 10th and the year is 2023 and the location is No Where, USA. Di Alect is now 35 years old. He has lived all of his life trying to figure out his place in life. From a young age, Di Alect has found it hard to communicate with others. Every time he feels like he has it figured out, someone tells him he is wrong. As he was with his parents for most of his youth, he learned to communicate with them in his own way.

Every morning, his Mom would wake him up for breakfast. “Get up. It’s time for food.” He would proceed to get up and eat. His Dad was always at the table before him and would greet him the same way each morning: “Your ass couldn’t beat me to the table if I paid you to.” That was the morning ritual. Mom always spoke in a “matter of fact” kind of way and Dad always brought the tough love.

It came time for Di Alect to go to school where he would combine his mother’s and father’s way of speaking and form his way of communicating. He was in class when the bell rang for lunch. Di Alect looked at the boy next to him and said, “It’s time for food. I bet you can’t beat my ass to the table if I paid you.” His teacher was shocked at what she heard and called him to her desk. He was in trouble and he knew it but he didn’t understand why.

The teacher informed him, “That kind of language is not acceptable.” He looked at her, puzzled. This was the way he spoke at home, and his parents never yelled at him, so who was this lady to do so? After that incident he changed the way he spoke at school and he continued to speak at home in the same way he always did.

Di Alect came to make plenty of friends at school, but it seemed that every one of his friends had a different way of speaking. Which way was correct? Why did so many people have different ways of saying the same thing? That would be a question he would ask himself throughout his life. Di Alect was now 20 and ready to enter the work force. He was equipped with all manners of speaking and communicating and was ready for life.

He entered the office building where he was greeted by the person who would be interviewing him. He offered Di Alect a seat and asked if he wanted water or coffee, and he responded, “NAH, nothing for me.”

The interviewer shot him a look and continued. “Why do you want to work here?” was the next question. “Cuz I feel that I can do good in dis environment.” The interviewer said to Di Alect you have a great education and good references, but the manner in which you speak will never get you anywhere.

The interview was concluded and again Di Alect was confused; if I’m qualified, why does it matter how I speak?!

That was the new question. If people always understood what he was saying, why did it matter how he said it? If anyone was offered a million dollars but it would be in pennies and not paper money they would still take it. In the end it was still a million dollars. It didn’t matter how it came.

Why does the “proper” way of speaking lead to success and the wrong way to demise? Unfortunately for Di Alect, now 35, the question still remains. Language is forever evolving and there will never be a “correct” way of speaking. Expression is always going to be unique to the person and success will always come to the one who pursues it. Never let anyone say that the way you express yourself is wrong. Just say,

“How Dare you!”

“Words Matter!”



### Released: The Discovery of the Ultimate Key by Sidney “Quan” Butler

*Editor’s Note: The following essay was selected as a winner of a First Year Writing Award by Lewis University’s English Studies Department to be featured at a FYW Showcase event November 21.*

Born into the land of the sleep and the home of the slave; I mean land of the free and the home of the brave. All of my senses are operable and well but the most important function imprisoned me. No one looked and saw the chains inside the baby’s mouth binding both the brain and tongue. At the first glance, the bronze skin, wild wavy jet black hair and majestic features would not lead one to consider this sighting a sentencing for me, a boy with a tormenting stutter that stagnated the expression of the creative depths of my mind. Stuck on my shoulders in thought not being able to effectively speak is like a substantial amount of time in solitary confinement, forced to resiliently dwell in the confinement of the mind. My tongue is the guard who has the power to unlock the flow of my expression. Throughout adolescence agency was gained through silence and writing. The power of words and their universality was understood. Different letters, origins, meanings and sounds. Fearful of embracing them, I just silently acknowledged their presence in conversation with myself. Observational learning built my courage but not my fluency.

Being poor and ignorant, no one knew what was wrong with me or how to cure me of this dis-ease. Growing up in a maternal family of generations of powerful, outspoken original femininity made my swimming in emotional whirlpools of verbal waves a daily failure. My earth (mother) gave birth to me when she was seventeen, so we truly matured together similar to siblings both raised by my grandmother with her sixth grade education. Drowning in the depths of the parenthood ocean caused literacy to literally not be alive in that house. Holding books was not part of the rhetorical ambiance.

Silence become my relative rhetoric in encounters with others. Understanding each other like yin and yang, my mother and I communicated through facial expressions for ours were the visuals of our thoughts. I became the pack on the back of my mother as she ventured through hallways of community colleges and universities pursuing degrees in education to become a teacher. I always wondered if she wanted to educate me on the cause and cure of my speech impediment or just to progress from the lower class to the middle class. The latter became manifested as time evolved and I still couldn’t shake the stutter. Traveling to educational institutions throughout the city, yet my mother didn’t understand that classrooms are placed between the ears of those who can’t readily and effectively express themselves. The walls are covered, floor to ceiling, with images, formulas, and conversations. Any useful information is higher education for the voiceless.

Close-mouthed I learned the dual capacity of words: to create and destroy. Not being able to pronounce words not only limited my vocabulary but my development from a male to a boy into a man. The way people can be captivated and inspired by words made me want to be better. The day came when I began to push past the guard as I took back control of my rudder (tongue) and steered myself towards the freedom of expression. I read more in school and became intrigued with the attention I received when I spoke out. Because I comprehend well, writing and drawing was the rhetorical agency that I became strengthened through.

Cruising through life not being able to speak the truth was not taken seriously until the truth had to be defended to free me from a cage filled with societal outcasts and “superpredators”. Seeing how Ebonics stood no chance against legalese in the court room awakened the realness of speech to me. It was not until I encountered the judicial system that I had seen how words were used to take lives. In physical confinement, I saw how many people actually struggled with speech impediments, articulation, and comprehension. The sight of men and women losing the greatest possession of existence because they did not understand a law that consisted of a language that no one on the planet no longer spoke will either motivate you to learn or die a slow death of ignorance.

It was in the Cook County jail where I met an older brother named Terry Bond, who was illiterate his whole life until his mid-thirties.





### **Released: The Discovery of the Ultimate Key by Sidney “Quan” Butler (cont...)**

He gave me a copy of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley and told me that reading is fundamental to survival and livelihood. Learning from both him and Malcolm, I found a dictionary and studied words that had the same meaning so I could use words that allowed me to flow in my delivery without triggering a stutter. Taking heed to the advice, I began to read different books for educational purposes, changing what I considered to be entertainment. I was astounded to learn that Malcolm X, one of the most articulate and powerful leaders of Black America in the 1960s, became educated through prison studies. I stopped being a part of and listening to frivolous conversations, for no one has been compensated from those meaningless and baseless statements. My granny mailed me a book called *The Secret* about the law of attraction. It was then that I was introduced to the magnetic consciousness. I understood how the thoughts that I focused on became a part of my reality. I see words as being divine tools when properly placed in clauses: super powers for common folk.

Being the first born male out of the last three generations maternally, I feel obligated to guide and protect my loved ones. The plight of my people being bound by the misunderstanding of words drives my elevation. The scripture was right when it said that my people suffer from a lack of knowledge. I am a firm believer in Proper Education Always Corrects Errors. For me words are the vehicles that transport my thoughts and ideas into the plane of manifest, allowing me to be heard, felt and understood. Words are the keys forged to unlock my destiny. Keys to free me from all forms of bondage. Words are like herbs used to heal torn souls and confused minds. Words are the relief after adversity. When I have been in my lowest states, naked and afraid in the view of the world, words have royally and righteously clothed me.

Those years my tongue was wrapped in silence like a cocoon cultivated an inner transformation within my reflection and myself. As a man, mature and evolved, I am like the owl on the oak tree. The more he saw the less he spoke. The less he spoke the more he heard. Listening to different life forms has given me strength when I was vulnerable and quiet. Every time I open my mouth my creative expression takes flight to voice the reality of the many who can't speak for themselves. At the end of the day, can I really be ok if my neighbor is not? Prison is an oppressive, voiceless place. In the workshop of the mind, the voices of the ridicules are cut out as rhetorical agency creates meaningful lives from within. Finding comfortability in my understanding of complex concepts calms the stutter as I patiently strive towards my education and enlightenment. I speak freely when I am at peace.



### **Write Back by Ron Jackson**

While sitting in my bed, I zoned out into my own little world. I was in deep thought thinking about my life. Wondering why was I sitting in this bed in the first place. I was too frustrated to watch TV, so I was stuck staring at the wall. In the midst of my thoughts the mail man arrived to deliver mail. I jumped out of bed quick, hoping that it was money or a package that I had been waiting on.

He handed me a letter from a name that I didn't know. I just couldn't recognize the name. I started wondering who is this and nothing came to mind. As I started reading the letter, I got no closer to knowing who it was from. The further I read on, the deeper my thoughts went. As I read I came across a sentence that said, "When I said I love you and told you that I was playing, I was serious, I really do love you." I knew exactly who this was at this point and as I looked at the end of the letter I saw a heart with her name. "Judy". The name that I knew her by. I didn't know what to think but I wondered how did she get my name and address because I never told her. I contemplated about writing her back, but I never liked writing. I didn't want people reading my thoughts because I didn't want to be judged by others. I already had to be judged through speaking and my actions which was something I couldn't hide I felt I can keep my thoughts hidden in my head by not writing them. I didn't want an extra voice.



I asked my friend Ray Ray if I should write her back and he implied “yes”. I wanted to write her back, but I didn’t want to write back at the same time. I decided to ask others and the results ended with a 50/50 split. There were several friends saying write back and several saying they didn’t know. Only a few said, “Don’t write back,” so it was more like a 40/40/20. I thought about this for a month and finally decided to write back, but to no avail. I never received a response. I felt devastated, I became exasperated. I felt as if I was not a good writer and thought this is why I don’t write back.

Shortly after this experience I started receiving a lot of letters. Letters that kept me out of that bed, in deep thought. I would always call whoever wrote me, but never really wanted to write back. Previously I only really wrote to do school work. I fought the feeling of writing back or not but my loving personality of caring for others wouldn’t allow me to not write back anymore. So I started writing back whenever I received a letter. During this time I began to realize that people didn’t write me back often. That created despair and led me to a Nadir moment. I lost the little interest that I did gain in writing at that point, so I stopped writing.

When I would call people they would always ask me to write them again, but I would say “you didn’t even write back.” Often I would get the response “I’m going to write back.” Then it crossed my mind that if my writing is bad, why does everybody continue to ask me to write back. My initial thought was I’m not writing you again because you never write back, I’ll just call. That attitude changed when I learned the impact that my letters had on everybody. They would clearly express their feelings and tell me the exact parts of the letter that touched their heart. I would often get letters asking me for advice, telling me the effect I had on them and how much they learned from me. I didn’t think I was even teaching them anything, but they had learned from me being around me and seeing how I move. Now they wanted that knowledge to be taught to them through letters. I received emotional letters, love letters, miss you letters, cards, pictures and visits weekly. I never felt so needed before, I had to WRITE BACK.

Afterwhile I became a writer, but for letters only. I loved the effect my writing had on people and I was enjoying the moment of writing. I was frequently asked from friends to write letters from them. When I got in contact with a close friend I started writing her and I heard the words from her that no one had ever told me. She would always ask me to write her, then one day she received a letter from me and said, “This is the Best letter that I have ever read in my life.” I couldn’t believe it, I said “Naw it ain’t.” She insisted it in fact was and that she was being honest. I originally thought because she was my Girl now that she was over exaggerating, but learned she was serious.

That is the day when I realized that I’m a good writer, it encouraged me, gave me inspiration and motivation to write more than letters. I felt ecstatic, it wasn’t only the fact that she said those words, it was integrated with the fact that she is a college graduate with a Master’s in Professional Counseling, Bachelor’s in education, English and communication and that she is a school teacher. I began to think about all the times that people told me to write them, but didn’t write back. I started playing scenarios out in my head, but whatever the truth of the matter was, it was. The fact is that I wasn’t neglected due to me having bad writing skills.

Now, I’m interested in writing and becoming an author. I’ve wrote an urban novel, and I’m working on a children’s book and a pre-teen book. A children’s book that will help kids respect themselves, each other and their teachers while in the school environment. I was inspired to do this by the same woman who read the letter of her life. She is going through this as a school teacher and I want to impact children through my writing. The Pre-Teen book will be about me and my daughter’s relationship and the hardship that we face from me being incarcerated 95% of her life. I also write on a website to inspire others to understand life, cope with life and I give them different perspectives and perceptions of life.

I say to you don’t let the hardship of writing deter you from becoming a writer. Don’t be discouraged through things that may be hard for you. Use that experience to elevate, flourish and prosper and always remember WRITE BACK!!!



### Literacy Narrative: It's a Rap by Kyle Starks

"I will achieve it" clap, clap, clap, "if I believe it" clap, clap, clap, "I will achieve it" clap, clap, clap, "If I believe it" clap, clap, clap. My elementary teacher had a very unique way of teaching us through the art of music and poetry. Monday thru Friday at the beginning of class we would first start the day off by saying the Pledge of Allegiance, then we would recite a musical chant that my classmates and I would come to know as the pledge to ourselves. These were the final words to that chant my fifth grade teacher Ms. Carson had us all remember.

Well, let me be more transparent. My second year of fifth grade teacher Ms. Carson had us remember because I decided the prior year to focus on being the class clown rather than have any grades be the point of concentration I was forced to repeat another year of fifth grade and watch my former classmates through a window embark on their fresh journeys into the exciting new life of middle school. I was a very smart kid coming up during my juvenile years. I knew how to work on any type of technology, and I loved math. However, I had an issue with writing because I wouldn't have much to say and get bored really quickly. Back in those days I loved going to school for one reason and one reason only: to socialize. I mean I liked learning new things, but making people laugh was way more exciting to me. That is until I was held back.

The first day of my second year of fifth grade was one I was painstakingly dreading. I can recall thinking to myself, here we go again; I don't want to get to know or talk to any of these little kids, and why must I do this stuff all over again, I already know how to do it, (referring to the classroom assignments). Boy oh boy, how remarkably wrong I was, I would later come to find out. I ended up liking all of my classmates and grew a very close bond with them all. I also learned so much more than I could have ever expected to. If it wasn't for one of the most relatable, loving, young hip teachers I ever was to encounter during my grade school years, I believe my first day of school would have looked more like my thoughts.

Ms. Carson's relaxing cool demeanor helped me to deflate my chest so I could just relax. I was able to open up on the very first day. My fear was that people would make fun of me for failing and I would become a pariah, but she welcomingly made sure that each and every last one of us was comfortable, included, and ready for the exciting new school year. Ms. Carson was a young African American woman, who if you were ever to run across, you would definitely catch her African vibes. She had a dark skin complexion, small afro, with a strong accomplished woman disposition. She wore this small gold chain that sparkled in your eyes when you looked at it that I'll never forget. She was also very pretty. She liked all the latest and greatest things us kid, were into, like music which made her really easy to talk to.

As the year progressed Ms. Carson introduced us to poetry. This was the part of my life where I began to look at writing totally different. It got interesting and fun to me. Poetry had become my thing. Little did I know that it would be the things that helped me form my niche for writing rap music, which would then later assist me in becoming a much better writer. Especially because at that time I hated writing. I mean out right hated it. The only thing writing and I agreed with, was when I knew it was time for me to write a love letter to a girl that I liked, which was "Do you want to go with me? Yes or no?" It just seemed like I almost never had anything worthwhile to say. But then during our lessons on poetry Ms Carson would instruct us to actually express ourselves in the poems we would write. This allowed me to see the process of writing differently. I was able to articulate what I thought not what or how I thought someone would want me to think. In other words poetry let me think and get my thoughts out.



### Literacy Narrative: It's a Rap by Kyle Starks (cont...)

Poetry didn't just help me find my voice in writing, but also led me to the art of rap. I was rambling through my mother's cd case one day trying to find my favorite rappers (Tupac Shakur) album when I came across a cd that I mistook for the one I was looking for. It was one of his albums but it was one solely dedicated to the poetry which I knew nothing about him writing. Here it was, my favorite artist, that I thought I knew everything about was a bonified poet. A very good poet too I might add. Seeing someone that I'd admired for so long doing the thing that I myself had come to like, was very affirming for a kid. That was the day I decided I wanted to become a rapper.

As I was growing into this rap career (that I thought I wanted but years later would change my mind about), I would listen to Tupac and others like him and learn how they started and ended their songs. As I studied each record I came to realize that these were just tales being told, but with a little more finesse and pizzazz. I would listen, then try to mimic those methods in my own raps. After much practice I became very good, I would even say greater than good because I believe I sounded better than a lot of artists that had music careers. I don't write rap music anymore but it's no question that the practice of formulating stories in my rap songs helped my writing abilities. Writing essays, proposals, bios, or any other hype of technical text, is more parallel to rap music than some people might like to think. They both use a lot of the same ingredients: cadence or cohesion, metaphors and onomatopoeias, and all those other great things that make up a unique sentence. There's rhythm in writing. When I'm in the midst of doing a writing assignment I find myself rhyming as if I were still writing rap songs.

Many people in the hip hop community define a rap as a flow, so whenever I'm doing my writing assignments, I pay attention to the structure of them like a rap song. I don't want my points to be misunderstood, so I make sure I'm flowing, pun intended.

Ultimately, if poetry was the thing that kicked off my ideas, then rap would be the art that helped me with my stories. Through Ms. Carson's pedagogy I was able to take something that I knew and liked, and use it to help me complete what use to be for me a tedious task. The benefit is now I'm able to formulate all the components of this beautiful act in my writing, so literally at the end of my essays I can confidently say "it's a rap!"



### When Love Meets Rage by Donell Simmons

In this world today, most of us have filled up our conscience with so much chaos and violence that our rage has loved for us. For instance, just look at what has become of our hearts' and minds' perceptions because now many of us think lustfulness is love. And somehow rage has taken the place of the nature of love and has even allowed enmity to be perceived. But could there be a way for love to help us return to its consciousness? Or, will love just find a reasoning in the rage of today's world? There are so many questions that I myself cannot validate an answer for, but published writer bell hooks seems to have discovered a key to this problem, a key that hooks has called "self-love." But what is this self-love and how will it help to change the minds of today's world? When we have reinvested ourselves back into the constitution of love, then we'll have the ability to face our rage.

In *All About Love*, a book written by bell hooks, hooks describes how and why we need to obtain self-love and if how if we don't love ourselves, then we could not possibly love someone else. To obtain this self-love, hooks explains that this is not an easy task, because there are "simple axioms that make self-love sound easy but only make matters worse. It leaves many people wondering why, if it is so easy, they continue to be trapped by feelings of low self-esteem or self-hatred (54)." So what are these axioms and how do we help those who are trapped by them? In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 'axiom' is defined as "a statement that is generally accepted as true."





So, by the definition of axiom, we can agree that everyone's general truth may be a little bit different. So let us start at the beginning of our knowledge from where I believe had led many of us into rage: birth. At birth, the understanding of love was never a meaning or an emotional feeling, probably because we were still processing what this side of the life was. So as our life began to take its steps, we had to work through all of the many perceptions that did not fit into our comfort zone, or into what was declared for us. The problem with this, once we have circumscribed, is that we easily forgot how love can mean something different to the next person's morals or religious beliefs. And by being so blinded by our own settlements we refused to enlist to any virtues or values. Because in fact, the only true thing that we do know is that our position has entitled us to act against, or in other words "medaled" us to fight for dominance, as if we are entrusted to defend love. So within this moment of threat our feelings are enraged into conflict and this has allowed ourselves to spiral out of control from our original understanding of love. In return, this has mistakenly allowed enmity to corrupt. But even if we decided to compromise with the opposite of our engagement, which is just love in itself, it will only mean even more rage unless we reinvest back into the constitution of love.

- 1) trust (v.): 1. to place confidence: depend. 2. to be confident: hope. 3. entrust. 4. to permit to stay or go or to do something without fear or misgiving. 5. to rely on or the truth of: believe. 6. to extend credit to.
- 2) commit (v.): committed; committing. 1. to put into charge or trust: entrust. 2. to put in a prison or mental institution. 3. transfer, consign. 4. to carry into action: perpetrate (a crime). 5. to pledge or assign to some particular course or use--commitment (n.) committal (n.)
- 3) care (v.): caring. 1. to feel anxiety. 2. to feel interest. 3. to give care. 4. to have a liking, fondness, taste, or inclination. 5. to be concerned about (what happens).
- 4) respect (v.): 1. to consider deserving of high regard: esteem. 2. to refrain from interfering with (another's privacy). 3. to have reference to: concern-respecter (n.).
- 5) knowledge (n.): 1. understanding gained by actual experience (a -- of carpentry). 2. range of information (to the best of my --). 3. clear perception of truth. 4. something learned and kept in mind.
- 6) responsibility (n.): the quality or state of being responsible. 2. something for which one is responsible.

Now, as you can see by their definitions, there is solidarity amongst these combinations. To have trust and commitment means we are entrusted, so since we are entrusted then we got to care for ourselves and each other, because care tells us to be concerned about. In which respect entities concern as well, but it also tells us to refrain from interfacing with. So now that we have understood trust, commitment, and respect, we then have developed the knowledge which has given us a clear perception of truth. Then, finally with all five compartments, we are bound to this responsibility to hold firm to this constitution of love.

bell hooks has presented a fine description to the understanding of self-love that has helped lower the bridge, so that my definement of the constitution of love can be a complimentary support, to help change the conscience state of today's enraged love. Even Valerie Kaur will agree that this reinvestment in ourselves is possible, but "only when our rage was subdued could we unlock our human potential to love others, even our opponents" (Kaur, *See No Stranger* 104). Because we have rediscovered the combination and have the cause and effects of our general acceptances, we now have the ability to face our rage.

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### The Woman in the Red Shirt by Dameion Thurman

As far back as I can remember I have always been able to read. At four years old I remember reading comic books with my friend Kevin. At around 8 years old I watched a movie that consequently started my quest for knowledge and ignited my passion for reading.

First I must explain a pivotal event that acted as the tinder to light the blaze burning within me. At the age of 7 I was a fan of the Lone Ranger. I had his toy gun, his black mask, and I liked to say his catch phrases. One day, while my mother was inside Woolworth's department store, My best friend Tommy and I were playing outside the store. Tommy had his toy gun and I had mine, and we were playing "cowboys and Indians." Whoever we saw wearing any red was an Indian and we had to shoot them. Tommy saw a woman wearing a red shirt. "Bang bang," he said as he pointed his gun at her. She grabbed her stomach and she said, "You got me," and she smiled at Tommy.

Next, she walked towards my direction, so I pointed my toy pistol at her and two loud "bang bangs" sounded off. The woman in the red shirt jumped as if startled. Then she grabbed my arm and slapped me so hard in my face that I dropped my Lone Ranger gun on the ground. As she released my arm she said, "How dare you" to me. She looked at Tommy and said, "Didn't somebody teach you not to play with 'Niggers'?" It was the first time a white person called me the N-word to my face. I had so many questions running through my mind then. As Tommy and I watched, my mother pummeled that woman until I could no longer tell where her red shirt ended and her face began. I wondered why did she not get mad when Tommy play shot her? Why did she call me that, and why was Tommy not to play with me? When I looked that word up in the dictionary, it only had definitions like ignorant or stupid person, or lacking knowledge.

About a year later during the fall school semester my teacher, Ms. Davis, assigned our class homework. During the weekend we were to watch a movie mini-series called Roots that was to air on ABC because we were gonna learn and discuss American history the following week. I watched this movie in awe and when it ended it showed that it was based on the autobiography of Mr. Alex Haley. I believe, as I mentioned earlier, that that is the moment the quest for knowledge and my love affair with reading sparked. This movie had a significant, overwhelming, transformative, and mind opening impact on me as a young Black American.

I went to the library in search of the book Roots, and to my joy it was there. It was the first time I ever went inside a library even though I walked past it every day. I started to stop in the library after school every day to read for about 45 minutes. I felt like I had won the library when I finally got me a library card, because now I could take books home with me to read for weeks at a time.

From watching and reading Roots, I got some answers to a lot of my questions that were slapped into me by the woman in the red shirt. To my shock, it was not something I had done that was the problem. It was who I am, the color of the black skin, that the woman in the red shirt hated. The N-word echoed round and round in my head as my brain struggled to understand just how powerful and destructive this tiny word was. It made so sense, had no logic to it; how could people hate me without ever meeting me? It was so disgusting to me, it was like pouring chocolate milk on Doritos and eating them. Sickening!

Roots had given me answers, but it also brought new questions I wanted answered. Questions like why did white people hate black slaves so much? Why did they treat them so bad? What makes black people and white people so different? Most importantly, if white people's hate of black people ended when slavery ended a long time ago, and this is America where everyone is created equal, then why do white people today call me the N-word? I searched the library, reading any book I thought might hold answers to these questions.

I read so many books about biology, history, social studies. None of them explained to me what evidence proved that black people were inferior to whites. I understood why some of my teachers were shocked when they learned that I had the highest reading comprehension of all the students in our classroom. They expected that one of the white kids would be the smartest pupil, not the only black kid.



I enjoyed showing how intelligent I was; I welcomed all challenges. I somehow thought if I proved I was smart then no one would hate me just because I was black. I thought I could change things just by making people judge me for who I was and not what I was. So reading became my pastime. I asked for and received a set of Encyclopedia Britannica for Christmas which I loved and cherished.

As I reflect on those moments in my childhood, I am glad I did not become a bitter, angry person, filled with hate towards white people. Unfortunately, I know many children that did. The examples and lessons given to me by my family members have molded me not to judge or hate any group of people. Some of my wonderful teachers also are responsible for showing me that love and education together can overcome prejudice and hate. So today, I can truly say to the woman in the red shirt, I forgive you.



### **Tower of Confidence by Garry O. Thompson**



Growing up, I could be a bit of a mixed bag. A little loner, reserved and shy. A little social, boisterous and fun. A little wild child, stubborn and rebellious. I like to think of my inner strength as an inborn quality; gifted by the one God, roughened by Uncle George.

I would come home from school sometimes and be met with an open ambush. My uncle would pounce on me with cat-like speed and power, and I would find myself pinned to the floor trying my best to fight off a heavy, 30-something, full grown man. It never seemed to matter when he would pin me, that I was an asthmatic. So imagine me back then: young, dark, lanky, and light weight, stuck beneath a 200-plus pound 'tough guy' like a tooth pick between teeth, struggling, squirming, turning blue, and begging for help.

These scrimmages with Uncle George were the beginning of my confidence training and they helped me to recognize that I possessed the courage to face and overcome many challenges. Even so, I occasionally had confidence issues.

My confidence took a small hit after I fumbled the construction of a word in a sixth grade tryout for the national spelling bee. Let me tell you, I'd have given five nickels just to have that "quarter" back! I recovered from the crash of the bell's ring against my ear, indicating my ejection from the contest, and I learned to exercise care even in areas where I may feel comfortable.

This experience also led me, through practice, to the development of what is now an expansive Vocabulary. Of course, I went through the phase of awkward approach with girls. There was that "one time at band camp" and then, there was the summer of 1991.

The summer of '91 was a memorable year for me. It was the year that I had my first opportunity to participate in ROTC camp at Fort Custer, Michigan. The experience was all: fun, fulfilling, and painful. I was able to participate in all of the many activities offered at the camp, which, interestingly, they call "confidence courses".

There were all sorts of courses thrown at us poor cadets, to challenge us mentally and physically, and in ways we could never have imagined. There was the parachute jump, the rope wall, and the barbed wire crawl. After this one, Sarge didn't let you stand up until you ate a little dirt....Mmm! We had a course similar to something you might recall from Steve Austin's Broken Skull Challenge. You know, the ones where you craftily navigate some wicked arrangement with the object of keeping your boots from touching the ground. My challenge, however, came at the rappelling course... the tower of doom.

If I recall, it was 55 feet of tall, dark, and ugly.... an imposition if I ever saw one, and an absolute terror. From the ground, having to climb the ladder (which narrows as you ascend) to the top of the tower seemed innocuous enough, but about halfway up is when my mind began to set off its alarms. By the time I reached the platform of the tower, I was already psychologically wobbly. I questioned whether I could really go through with it, and wondered if I actually would. I tried anyway to push through, and got as far as taking the lane and the ledge, as it were, of the downside of the tower. That's exactly when the nerves hit me full! My legs were jelly.

My confidence was shattered. My busy imagination projected the plummet of my 6 foot 3 inch frame, and left me splayed against the cold camp ground, dead, or badly injured.



### Tower of Confidence by Garry O. Thompson (cont...)

Nervous and afraid, I sat down on top of the tower and cried. Major Crosby, Commandant at Fort Custer, and for the ROTC program at my high School, assured me in his firm way of two things: first, that I could complete the course; and that if I couldn't, that going back down ladder side would be more frightening. I looked back down the ladder side and saw a fatal, tumbling plummet. "Nah, no thanks!"

Acknowledging that he had a very strong point, I drew from my native strength, stood up, and agreed to take the downside of the tower, as long as he handled my lane. After he agreed, I looked down in front of the tower to find all of my peers, about 48 cadets (male and female) looking up. Oh s\*\*\*, I thought, "the girls!"

My mind began to consider the calculus of my embarrassment, and I was certain that whatever social grace I had been granted was surely revoked. I imagine my uncle was there on the tower with me back then, subconsciously pinning me, urging me forward with the familiar avuncular phrase he used as a taunt: "What you gon' do boy?!" I made a mental shrug, took a deep breath, summoned up my courage, and took the lane and ledge again.

Rather clumsily, I coerced my lanky frame into a 90° angle, and made my first thrust. My boots thudded back against the tower wall. "Ahh, safe," I thought. And again, thrust, then thud. Thrust, then thud. Thrust, then thud. Thrust, then finally. thump! I was back on solid ground.

I took several steps backward with my hands above my head yelling, indicating that I was no longer on the course. I took off the leather gloves, and the harness made of rope, and sat safely on the ground, adrenaline rocking me back and forth. Happy to be healthy and whole, and to have pushed past both of my fears (heights and failure), I cried a little more in relief, and at the same time, laughed too out of disbelief.

Unexpectedly, some of the young women came and put their arms around me, and gave me verbal re-assurances. Even the fellas were not as judgmental as I believed they would be. The next year at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, I sought the rappelling course with excited fervor and abundant confidence. Second time around? Crushed it!

Many of the courses at camp presented me with opportunities to sound out the depths of my mettle, and to rise or faint in the face of challenges. While I had some indecision about my strength on the platform of that tower, it taught me some meaningful things about myself, some of which helped to develop the larger part of the character found in me today.

The most important things I learned at camp was how to be responsible for others and myself.

I discovered an inner resolve to overcome my fears and confront any challenges. After this event, I started to approach everything with the same bearing that helped me in that conquest. I became more assertive, I had more confidence all around, and these translated into greater success in my endeavors, especially with the ladies.

Having developed my confidence through experiences, it helped me to be intrepid when I encounter new and difficult material. I suffer no fear of failure with unfamiliar words and complex ideas, neither with pronunciation and comprehension as a reader, nor with usage and spelling as a writer. I simply approach my inner tower of confidence, narrow my focus, and thrust myself into whatever learning challenge lies ahead of me.

Today, anybody will tell you, I can still be a bit of a mixed bag. Even without my fear and restraint, I'm still somewhat a loner. I still like to have fun. I'm still a little stubborn too... and just in case you were wondering, I'm still O for everything against Uncle George... but I can live with that!

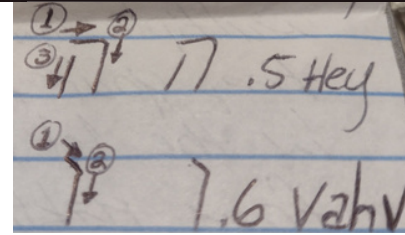




# The Power of Education



**By Zôharriel**  
Ani Ah-kho-ree!  
(I'm back!)



Shalom Brothers and Sisters!

First, I must go backwards and add two letters that I accidentally omitted from my earlier writing lessons.

Language is at the core of education, whether written, spoken, or signed. Your level of understanding and ability to do or create a thing from within yourself cannot be conveyed without language. Language is a “systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings,” according to Webster’s Dictionary. Therefore, the acquisition of multiple languages is the power to convey multiple thoughts, ideas, and feelings. The person who speaks multiple languages with a high level of education and intelligence can be considered to be the most powerful and important person on a voyage around our world, no matter the vehicle used. I’m sure history is full of stories of people being saved by the translator in their midst. I know there is no shortage of skits in comedy that display this power. There is one example that we as incarcerated individuals can identify with better than anyone else. You may have had the option to learn a second language in high school but, like me, you dropped out before you took the class. Then, you find yourself in a court room where multiple languages are being spoken: Spanish, English, Latin, legalese, and you are speaking Ebonics. You’re a person in a war with bullets to a nine-millimeter handgun in one hand and an AK47 rifle in the other. No matter how you put them together, the bullets fall out the barrel with no power to affect the forces before you. The educated translator of the above languages in a court room is a person with today’s Draco and a 160-round drum in a gun fight with a person who has a two-shot derringer. Being educated in multiple languages gives you the power to get and keep your freedom! This understanding is captured in the first amendment. Congress is forbidden from making any law that will abridge our freedom to speak or to redress our grievances (the taking of our freedom!). Education is the drawing out of thyself the Spirit of Yah/God and creating heaven (Justice, Peace, Love, Righteousness) on earth with language. Shalom, Shalom!

## By Yarmale Thomas

Growing up, I didn’t value or understand the power of being educated, nor the impact it would have on my life. In grammar school, I just wanted to play with my friends and eat lunch. In high school, I wanted to hang out with my friends and start food fights in the cafeteria, not understanding the opportunity to acquire knowledge and change the trajectory of my life. Needless to say, I took it all for granted. The last five years of my life, I’ve noticed something amazing that’s all around me...there has been a shift: a paradigm restructuring. The narrative that we are irredeemable because we’re incarcerated has been dismantled and destroyed. There is a new paradigm and narrative being constructed and written...the catalyst? Education! When I walk around, I see so many men carrying books, hurrying to class, having debates about what the professors meant (or the author of the assigned readings). I see men helping other men with class and homework. I see men writing and rewriting and proofreading 3000-word papers. I see men walking with their heads held high, having a sense of self worth and dignity and value for themselves and others. I see men eager to help, teach, and empower others. This is such an awesome thing to see. Now it’s time for the world to witness what we have known for some time...This is what the Power of Education does! It brings about change and Hope. Live each day with purpose on purpose!





# The Power of Education

By David “Cap” Carter

Can we ever get to a place where we have a system functioning without race being a barrier to equality?

With the exception that you can consider race when ensuring that black and brown people fight and die for our country in the military service academies, the United States Supreme Court on June 29, 2023 banned the consideration of race in our college admissions, thereby eliminating the long fought for, blood stained gains of affirmative action, which sought in a small way to course correct the legacy of slavery, Jim and Jane Crow, Plessey v. Ferguson, etc...all ingrained with the machinatioous crimson soaked veneered cloth of white supremacy. As a consequence, we can't talk about “the power of education” without talking about the history and legacy of these facts and realities in this country. As Supreme Court Justice Jackson so eloquently stated in her dissent: “Deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life.” I would go further to say, especially in the lives of black and brown Americans in this country. WE know that education has the power to change people and places, but so does this country's institutional and structural power systems that deny the power thereof to so many of its citizenry. We will never be able to pretend that the table of racial, educational, and economic equality is a reality, and we can now all go on holding hands and singing, “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah...”

Plessey v. Ferguson (separate but “unequal”) didn't solve this country's racist laws, policies, and hatred within the hearts of our citizens, and neither did Brown v. Board of Education (desegregation and integration of our public school systems). Jesus didn't solve racism when he commanded that the word of good Christians and nations love their neighbors as themselves. This power of “love” is solely one of the heart. My life long learning of 60 years, and my formal educational experience, has had a major impact upon my life; it has given me purpose, direction, and a passion for social justice and the restorative arts. My aim is consciously with consistent effort to better myself, as well as those around me. Education has given me the ability to critically think and analyze all things, utilizing the exegesis approach to dissect the origin of things to bring about well-informed solutions to the problems and situations that we face in our world today. In contrast, education has affected me, and so many others like me in my communities, in a negative manner, based upon the red-lining zip codes in which we reside; you know, the “Robert Taylor, Englewood, K-Town, Cabrini Green” area codes throughout this country. It has been said that social scientists have determined the amount of prison beds that will be required in the future, based upon whether or not a child can read at a 3rd grade level at the tender age of about 8 years old. The power of a proper education has been denied to thousands of communities across this country based on their ethnicities and economic status in life K-12.

In conclusion, we do know that education is the key to a healthy, vibrant prosperous society, and it is the key principle of rehabilitative restorative processes by which reformation is possible. Father Gregory Boyle stated so eloquently in his book *Tattoos on the Heart*, “They say that an educated inmate will not reoffend. This is not because education assumes that this guy will get hired somewhere. It is because his view is larger and more educated, so that he can be rejected at ninety-three job interviews and still not give up. He's acquired resilience (87). And I agree!! That's the power of education!!

P.S. I had about 6 more pages of thought on this topic, but the word count forbade me. Thanks for the discussion!!

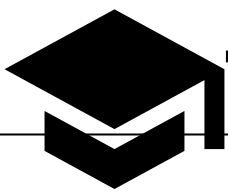
## Higher Education from My Point of View by Michael Jones

Education came to me during my early years of coming to age. The most important thing for everyone to know is your brain won't bust, nor will it come out of your ears.

We can't wait for someone to offer us an education; reach for the stars. Part of the voting rights have been dismantled. Roe v. Wade, taking away the woman's right to choose. Now, the striking down of the Affirmative Action Bill. Then arguing of what our kids can learn about history and their culture, how America was really built.

You know the easiest way for them to keep knowledge from you is put it in a book. Let's prove them wrong.

Shout out to North Park current students from Cohort 3 for staying strong and pushing it forward. Also to Northwestern (all Cohorts) for staying strong. Then, we have all the PNAP classes. Wow! Now, I can't forget the ABE class, the Pre-GED, and GED classes. They go next! Make room. Congratulations to all who have gotten their GED and Bachelor's degrees!



# The Power of Education

## The Power of Education by Robert Maury

I can imagine that the phrase, “The power of education” has many meanings, one for individuals currently involved in receiving an education, and another for those that have reached a certain plateau in their journeys. I, however, see education as a life-long endeavor. From my perspective, I see education as having many deleterious avenues—but one purpose. That purpose was greatly highlighted on me during one of the courses of my core curriculum at North Park Theological Seminary here at Stateville. The course was “Leading and Teaching,” facilitated by Professor Michelle S. Dodson, which highlighted the purpose of an education contained in one book initially: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire, and later expanded to include: *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks.

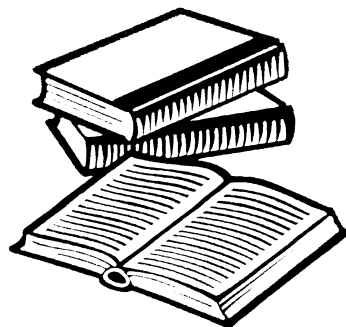
On the ninth page of the introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire outlines the “three goals of education”:

Goal 1: “Know thyself” through self-reflection, which leads to

Goal 2: “Come to understand the economic, political, and most assuredly, the psychological aspects (the ‘critical’ pedagogy) that allows the individual to become cognizant of the forces that not only control our lives, but also control the way we think and perceive reality and our role in it.

Goal 3: Become a positive element for change, meaning help set the conditions and arrangements (in and of our society) for a new life; become one of the people [that] after having acquired knowledge and power (through social consensus and liberative action and thought [conscientization and a meaningful praxis]); be about the business of transforming nature and [human]kind towards a more meaningful and love-filled life.

-Paraphrased from page nine of the introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Freire



**Change the Narrative by Flynard N. Miller**

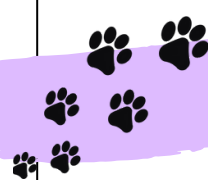
Hello everyone. My name is Flynard N. Miller, but my friends call me Fly 1. I am an author, motivational speaker, and student at Northwestern University. Education has been so powerful for me. I have met some amazing people on my educational journey: professors, doctors, scientists, lawyers, and PhD's.

Once upon a time I was in the county jail and a brother named "Squeek" held a prayer circle. The man said he had a dream that God had visited him and told him the fate of everyone in the room. There were about 30 of us. When Squeek got around to me, he said, "God told me you're going to do some time, but you'll get free and become the leader of your people..."

At this, a friend of mine laughed. "You're going to lead them off a cliff..." I was a high school dropout who could barely read and do arithmetic. I was hurt and embarrassed that my friend didn't believe in me that I could be a leader.

Since that time, I have fought tirelessly to prove him wrong. I've earned my GED. I have two associate degrees: one in theology and the other in general studies, and I'm earning my Bachelor of Science in General Studies from Northwestern University (via NPEP).

I have one novel manuscript for redemption finished, and I'm writing another for motivational speaking. The power of change in education is the ability to change the narrative.



**Power of Education by Taki Peacock of NPEP Third Cohort**

What education has done for me is make me a whole new person once again. I have been incarcerated since 1995, and I was seventeen at the time. The furthest that I went in school prior to becoming incarcerated was ninth grade. I have always been intelligent; the problem was I didn't always apply myself. In May of 2000, I attained my GED here at Stateville. This was one of my greatest accomplishments. I then went on to attain many certificates and attend countless programs. I want to make perfectly clear though that my greatest educational achievement hasn't been provided by any programs. I have been a ferocious reader. My self-motivation has come from, and is driven by, the pain of missed opportunities. I've been attending programs provided by DePaul University, North Park University, and now Northwestern University, having the spaces to utilize what I've learned already, and being given the chance to learn, grow, and be validated by top-level educators. I have been challenged to pull things out of myself that I wasn't necessarily aware existed. The education in of itself isn't what made the greatest impact on my life; it has been the people. The people have shown me that it isn't all of society who believes there's no value in me. The people helped restore my humanity; I feel a part of society again.

**By Abdul-Malik Muhammad**

My prior learning journey has encompassed many different facets of knowledge. However, I entered prison at 19 years old, as one of the youngest wrongfully convicted torture survivors of the City of Chicago and the Chicago Police Department, Area 1 police station. I barely knew how to read and write when I entered prison. Nobody ever felt sorry for me, mainly because of the deep class stratification and cultural stigma about adolescents who grew up in communities of color — deeply similar to a war zone community that is riddled by intracommunal violence. So, when I entered prison with a 50-year sentence under the Truth in Sentencing statute, there wasn't any urgency by IDOC to educate me. This meant that I had to educate myself because I wasn't going to wait for my name to come up to enroll into the next GED program. There was a long waiting list of names, so with a 50-year sentence at 100%, that meant my name wasn't going to come up for a very long time. Personally, I never knew how important education was until I came to prison. In my personal experience, all across IDOC, education is still being denied to incarcerated individuals, especially in maximum security facilities. The disparities that exist within the educational school systems of IDOC are hidden under layers of covert racism and retaliatory practices. For example, individuals in custody who are being housed in administrative detention aren't afforded the same opportunity as the general population — even though administrative detention is viewed as non-disciplinary. Therefore, there appears to be many inequities to the educational school system here in IDOC that persists for people of color post-conviction.

However, there are many great critical thinkers that have decades of experience, who are completely qualified to answer such questions like why can a person serving a prison sentence be denied an education? Where did they amass such a wealth of knowledge and intelligence? Based upon my view of these great critical thinkers, it can be argued that education has the power to make the oppressed become the oppressor because a lot of these great critical thinkers come from these same marginalized communities, and the same communities of color, of the individuals in custody.

In closing, there are many different kinds of social ills that may cause a person to choose to educate themselves. I guess one can say that my love of knowledge was born out of necessity to prove that I am innocent. Since I have been in prison, education has transformed my life and has become the purest form of love that I have ever experienced. I am now a graduate student and a Teaching Assistant of Northwestern University — with a BA in Social Sciences.





Chaplain LC Sutton



Chaplain  
Gene Moore

## *From the Logan Chaplaincy Department*

The Chaplaincy Department at Logan Correctional Center provides Individuals in custody with a wide range of opportunities for study and exercising their faith traditions. The following is a summary of our activities.

1. **Bible Studies:** Chaplaincy Departments often lead Bible study groups within correctional facilities. These studies provide individuals in custody with an opportunity for spiritual growth, reflection, and support. The frequency and format of Bible studies can vary, with some studies offering regular weekly sessions and others holding occasional special events or workshops.
2. **Book Clubs:** Book clubs can be an enriching and rehabilitative activity for individuals in custody. Logan offers book clubs focused on religious texts, inspirational literature, or general reading material. Individuals in custody can discuss the books they read, promoting personal growth and providing an alternative to negative influences.
3. **Angel Tree:** The Angel Tree program is run by Prison Fellowship during the holiday season. Angel Tree provides gifts to individuals in custody's children on their behalf. This program can help maintain family connections and provide emotional support during a difficult time.
4. **Special Occasions:** Chaplaincy Departments often plan and organize special events or occasions within correctional facilities. These may include religious holidays, cultural celebrations, and events that foster a sense of community and hope among Individuals in custody. The Chaplaincy Department may also invite guest speakers or arrange for live music performances to uplift the spirits of individuals in custody.

The Chaplaincy Department at Logan Correctional Center appreciates the hard work done by volunteers. Volunteers play a vital role at Logan Correctional Center providing support, mentorship, and resources to individuals in custody. Their dedication and efforts make a positive impact on the lives of those incarcerated. The chaplains recognize and acknowledge the contributions of these volunteers, as they often contribute to the rehabilitation and well-being of the individuals within Logan.





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

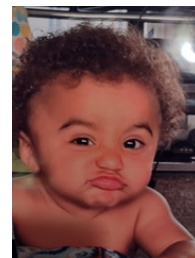


So here's another story of mine for the Blvd...

I recall being no more than 9 or 10 years old and learning a wise, valuable lesson. So, my Aunt Ba-Ba sent me to the store to get her some cookies, and on my way back I was approached by a friend of hers who said my aunt wanted me to give him the cookies. So, I first resisted until he said, "I swear to G \_ \_." When he said that, I gave it to him out of respect for God. Then I went to my aunt, who discovered I had been hoodwinked and was furious. I was shocked that he had lied on God, but I learned that not all people respect God. After that experience, every time I heard someone say they swear to Him, I would correct them because God doesn't have to be involved. A person is either going to believe you or not and God is too good to be disrespected. He also says to not use his name in vain.

### **Go King Kong! by Mishunda Davis-Brown**

1. When the fellas go to get a hair lining and end up with a line pushed 3 rows back. Go King Kong!
2. When you're "trying" to watch a game and your girl wants to "talk." Go King Kong!
3. When you know in your heart you passed a test but learn to find that you failed by 2 points. Go King Kong!
4. When you're expecting to see your favorite artist in concert and go to purchase tickets that you find are now extinct. Go King Kong!
5. When a friend agrees to help you with a task and you come to find that you're the only one "tasking." Go King Kong!
6. When you're in conversation with a person who's using "Big Words" that make no sense. Go King Kong!
7. When you know you're looking good and a bird decides to drop a #2 bomb on you. Go King Kong!
8. When you go fishing but catch no fish. Go King Kong!



### **Kong ain't got Shit on Me! Written by Bree Williams**

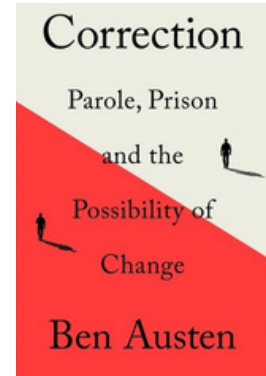


Liberation through education through multiple generations of procrastination turn the tide of time, they say that without education you can't earn a dime, for some that's fine, but not for me in this cruel world of mine. Incarceration, mind racing, tuned in to the right station, work out the problem till it doesn't exist anymore, stay steadfast, work diligently to defeat the academic crash. Clash of the titans Godzilla versus Kong fighting, that's me going toe to toe with any form of education, you know who won that fight, just look at the one who's writing. Manifestation, positive anticipation through unrelenting determination for a higher education makes my ancestors in the after life throw a grand celebration, I close my eyes and listen to the silence, feel the pulse in my right hand pulsating, no time for rejuvenation, keep yourself in preparation for a greater education, so when you succeed demonstrate to the world this is my declaration...DEDICATION TO EDUCATION.



# BOOK REVIEW and RESPONSE

WHAT ABOUT PAROLE?  
By RON HENDERSON II



Parole in Illinois. You're joking, right? This is not the funny reality of the over 2500 men & women currently serving sentences that either are or equate to life without parole (LWOP) in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and over 200,000 people that are doing so throughout the country. This is the outcome of the tough-on-crime rhetoric that has been spewed in this country for the past fifty years and played a big part in the ending of a comprehensive parole system in Illinois in 1978. It is my contention, however, that this mindset, and the practices that it produced, has actually done more to exacerbate crime and violence than it has done to deter it.

While brainstorming what to write for this article, I spoke with Joe Dole, a parole advocate and leader in Parole Illinois, and he suggested that I do a review of Ben Austen's book *Correction: Parole, Prison and the Possibility of Change* (Flatiron Books, 2023). IN this book Austen details the experiences of two men that were convicted in the 1970s and were two of the last people eligible for parole in Illinois. Austen shows how these men, who spent about 100 years in prison between them, rehabilitated themselves, eventually were granted parole, and went on to lead productive lives in society. One of the main problems with that process was how the parole board repeatedly relitigated their crimes instead of answering the question of if they had been rehabilitated. This issue was most prevalent when Austen reveals that one of the members of the parole board acknowledged that Johnny Veal, one of these two men, was living productively in prison and was unlikely to reoffend. Yet that same member voted against Johnny's release. Going beyond the journey of these two men, Austen points out how investing in those convicted of crimes and their communities has been shown to reduce incarceration rates when and where those practices have been implemented.

Reading Austen's book made me realize that the question of whether or not to bring back parole to Illinois does not hinge on an ability to show the injustices of mass incarceration or the fact that people are not defined by their worst acts. The truth is that the public at large needs to be educated on how not having a robust parole system plays a part in the crime and violence that they see and actually threatens their safety and security. I base this claim on the reality that crime is driven by two main factors: poverty and a low sense of worth.

Poverty places an individual in a position of need, having not, so their primary mindset becomes to find a means of meeting those needs. Morality and the law do not compute in the thinking when someone is trying to figure out how to survive day to day; therefore, the consequences of their actions don't either. Self-preservation tells them to go out and meet their needs by any means. If that can be accomplished by selling drugs, then do it. If stealing cars will provide money to buy food, cars will be stolen. If robberies and home invasions will pay the rent, so be it. Jane and John Q. Public need to come to the realization that when there are people in society that are desperate to meet their basic needs, no one is safe. This is evidenced in the fact that regularly on the early morning news there are stories of strings of robberies and/or car thefts in neighborhoods that usually don't have these issues. This reveals that when there is a financial disparity between the haves and the have nots, the have nots will go to take from the haves. We have seen this play out throughout history as well. I do not say this to justify these criminal acts but to put them in their proper context so that they can be addressed appropriately. Anyone that has spent time doing problem solving can attest to the fact that any solution that does not address the root of the problem allows said problem to persist. As such, it is inconceivable to truly attempt to combat the issue of crime without attacking poverty first.

The second contributor to crime I mentioned is a low sense of worth. It is not hard to acknowledge that a low self-esteem contributes to questionable decision making and risky behavior. Instances of individuals of all ages participating in unhealthy relationships because they don't value themselves properly are well known. So are situations where adolescents, teens, and young adults do unimaginable things to please their peers. Unfortunately, it is not widely recognized that a low self-esteem plays a

crucial role in crime as well. While thinking of the correlation between the two, I am reminded of something that Tupac Shakur's character, Bishop, said in the movie Juice, while talking to Omar Epps' character, "Q." Bishop says that "Q" had no value because he, who did not see any value in himself, could end his life whenever he chose. Bishop's thinking was that his actions didn't matter because he didn't matter. More specifically, "Q's" worth was even less because Bishop had the ability to take "Q's" life. Going deeper, this gave Bishop value in his own mind because at least he had the power to kill "Q."

Now, let us envision a person operating from this 'worth less' mindset. Their risk assessment skills are skewed because of their starting point. Since they don't matter, then consequences don't, either. The only thing that does matter is the objective. What crimes they commit or who gets hurt does not factor into the thought process. All because they internalized a low sense of worth. This is the reason that things like truth in sentencing, mandatory minimums, and sentencing enhancements, all of which are said to deter crime, in reality cause crime to persist. People of this mindset tell themselves, "Since society believes that I am meaningless and can be thrown away or warehoused like an animal or savage, I must be worthless." They believe that they are animals, savages, and that they are incorrigible. As such, there is no point in trying to become rehabilitated. The most dangerous aspect of this thinking is that they find a sense of worth in what society says. This is because it takes power to victimize people the way animals and savages do, and a person's desire for value motivates them to prove what is said of them to be true.

Once a person becomes aware of the driving forces behind crime, it would be unreasonable for them to come to the conclusion that the tough on crime practices being used in our state actually deter crime. The sad truth is that it has been known for more than a century that the way to combat crime is to invest in the people that commit it and the communities they come from. At a convention held in Ohio back in 1870, Zebulon Brockway, a twenty plus year veteran of prison employment, shared that he believed that individuals with free will "voluntarily elect and deliberately do wickedness," but he concluded that more often than not circumstances led them to commit crimes...and that the way to improve American prisons was to change how people were sentenced (Austen 13). In advocating for what would become parole, members of that same convention went on to declare that a judge or prosecutor that predetermined the date which a person would be rehabilitated made as much sense as a doctor deciding on a surgery before examining the patient (Austen 13). Ultimately, this convention brought about the initiation of parole in America and prisons being renamed correctional centers some six years later. By the 1920s, all but three states were issuing indeterminate sentences (Austen 15). Not only did this convention bring about a change in sentencing and the terminology used to describe where people convicted of crimes were held, it brought about a mindset for those individuals to be taught skills that could be used in society while they worked towards their release, too. Their success in the programing would determine how quickly they would be able to work down through security levels and eventually be released to a term of supervision. Unsurprisingly, crime rates dropped (Austen 15).

That was not the only example of supporting those convicted of crimes turning into the reduction of crime and incarceration rates given by Austen. In the 1970s, Finland had the same incarceration rates as the United States, and they decided to depart from a tough on crime mindset at that time. They began to inundate people on parole with services like generous welfare subsidies, job training, housing assistance, and unemployment benefits. Furthermore, people incarcerated were encouraged to vote, paid a decent wage, and given the same health care as other citizens. This was all in addition to receiving training that would address the ills that led them to crime in the first place. All of this was done from the beginning of their incarceration until their release (Austen 209-212).

Both of these examples were met with a drop in incarceration rates. The reason for this is simple: the governments dealt with the two main causes of crime. They combated poverty by providing job training and employment that came with livable wages and they showed the people that they had value by investing in them. This allowed the people to see value in their selves and provided a means for them to meet their needs.

In closing, I would like to make it clear that if we desire to reduce crime rates and make our cities safer, it is imperative that we not only acknowledge the need to provide social services and parole to those convicted of crimes, their families, and the communities they come from, but also that we do our best to inform others of the reasons behind this need.





Some years ago, my near, dear, brother Alex Negrón of “The Amplifier” fame described me to someone as a “glue guy.” Now, like me when I heard this description, you may be wondering right now: “What exactly is a glue guy?” Well, as Alex so eloquently put it all those years ago in a way only he could: “A glue guy is a person who brings people together. Scott finds ways to make peace despite our bullshit.”

In hindsight, Alex was the perfect person to christen me a glue guy. After all, if I’m a glue guy, then Prof. Negrón could best be described as a human wrecking ball. Not because of his sexy planet physique, mind you, but rather because of his unparalleled ability to smash apart communal harmony by saying or doing something that rubs someone (or someones) the complete wrong way.

In fact, now that I think about it, I’ve spent a lot of time and energy going behind Alex in an attempt to piece back together all the broken feelings and/or relationships he’s left in his path of destruction over the years. I don’t really have the space to mention every one of his private faux pas right now, but I will say this: whether it was the time he angered 90% of our community by saying we weren’t as committed to “this thing” as he was, or the study hall day when he pissed off the other 10% by insinuating that we didn’t take our studies seriously enough (in front of an attending Professor, no less), Alex never missed an opportunity to put my gluing powers to the test.

That said, I love Alex very much. I may not miss cleaning up after him, but I am forever grateful for the ways in which he’s supported me both inside these walls and beyond. Not only that, but I’m especially appreciative to him for putting a name to the role I play in our community. I never would have been able to do so in such a fitting way.

Being named a glue guy really is rather apropos. I do fancy myself as someone who tries to hold our community together so that we can all move forward on one accord. My first instinct has always been to find some sort of cohesive unity in the midst of our individual and collective mess--the divisiveness, jealousy, and contempt that holds us back and tears us apart.

After all, God has blessed me with a somewhat charismatic (dare I say, magnetic?) personality. Generally speaking, I’ve been able to move both within and throughout all the different cohorts, cliques, cabals, committees, and/or inner circles found among us. Now, my attempts to bring these different groups together haven’t always solved our problems or brought about world peace; however, I keep trying because I truly do want to see each and every member of our community get along, thrive, and succeed.

So, yeah, the role I play in our community is that of a glue guy. And as a glue guy I will continue to encourage us all to extend a little bit of grace and mercy towards one another as we attempt to break down the walls of divisiveness, jealousy, and contempt that have served to imprison us for far too long. And speaking of breaking down walls...

While my near, dear, brother Alex Negrón has certainly put a lot of effort into improving his people skills through the years, I hope and pray there’s another glue guy on hand at Sheridan who’s able to hold everyone and everything together whenever Alex inadvertently (and inevitably) comes in swinging like a giant Miley Cyrus sized wrecking ball.

--Scott Moore, AKA “Glue Guy”

# Poetry and Art Corner



Poem By Rodney Love

Everyone that's in your immediate circle  
Is part of a whole and we play a part  
In the whole in that person's life.

Example: I'm my mother's oldest child.  
I hold her accountable as a Mother to my younger siblings.  
I show her the mistakes she made and help her see  
the error of her ways.

She shows me the mistake I make  
over and over. The poor decision  
making I choose such as my nouns:  
People, places, things that I'm around  
or that has a negative influence over me.

## Featured Artist: Mary Ruth Parks

### "The Shat"

The boys in the shat was done to remind us of the innocence of children at play, safely in the backyard, unafraid of the events around them, a reflection of what community should reflect. These days our children have to be guarded, and in certain areas of the community the playgrounds are empty.



## Featured Artist: Kenneth "Ananyah" Key

Dear Grandma by John Knight

I've looked to you so many times,  
To draw strength from your smile.  
I've come to you for company,  
To talk for a little while.

I've laughed with you,  
and shared with you,  
A world of special things.  
I've learned from you,  
The precious joys,  
That only caring brings.

You taught me things I never knew,  
and cheered me up when I was blue.

There've been things that, I could not endure,  
But, because of you, I've grown and matured.

You've always supported me, you were my crutch,  
I want you to know, I appreciate you, so very much.

Now Baby Girl's taken over, and in her your voice is loud,  
As you look down upon us, I hope we make you proud.

## Poetry and Art Corner

Sunday by Alexis J. Santana

Beloved sun you have faded,  
leaving me in desolate darkness,  
I am but a glimmer of light,  
to your absolute brightness.

In the midst of embers dragged by the wind,  
drifting towards nothingness I question my end,  
anguish nudged me on to a page.  
I kindle at first then consume with a blaze.

Time can smother or ignite,  
I used clockwork to set myself right,  
with wisdom to fuel my flame,  
and a time as a place,  
beloved sun you have risen once more.



Stolen for a Profit by Lorenzo Davis

A conversation between a father and one of his Sons!  
Stolen and trapped into this wicked system of Mass Incarceration  
for a Profit. Stolen from my motherland off the coast of the  
Niger River, of Africa, packed in a cargo ship like Sardines;  
with other Black Men and Women! "Damn, Mass Incarceration Has Began On Our Family!" We were carried across  
that treacherous ocean, later became known to me as the  
Atlantic. Me and thirty nine others, arrived in some part of Mississippi, in chains and shackles, and taken to this  
big white house, and placed in the custody of Master Whitaker.  
We were forced to till, and work this foreign land, picking cotton and tobacco, from sun up til sundown six and a  
half days, and the sweat and blood: that came from all those beatings, I'll never forget. Had to learn this white  
being's language, and religion, and once I did was entrusted with a Job as the family carriage driver for the  
Whitakers! Born in 1796, and  
now considered a smart old fellow according to the very newspaper articles, you now hold in  
your hands! My name is Fil, and it's spelled with an (F), and  
even though I was stolen from my land, later on in life my family that I made over here became somewhat free!

Now I hear of a Descendant of mine named Zo, who feels ashamed of being incarcerated, and I feel for my son,  
because this new form of Slavery is in a 6 x 9 cell, Oh he  
must be living in hell! So I say to my son; who is also considered to be a Smart Old fellow, I see  
you were stolen away from your loved ones in 2004, and placed in a cell.

They made a Profit off me by forcing me to till their lands, and pick their Cotton and Tobacco, and even in 1857 at  
the age of 61 they have me listed, on that very piece of paper in your hand, valued as being worth \$500.00; and  
now they make a Profit off of you my Son of anywhere between \$60,000-\$90,000, by warehousing in a cell,  
which I know feels like hell! We may be  
stolen from our True Identity, Language, Name, and family members, but you know what;  
how you hear me, so can I, of the ones I was stolen from! For we are one my son in the Ethers! Do not be Ashamed  
Son for you are not to blame; the Shame belongs on those who enforce  
the Mass Incarceration on People of Color! Mass Incarceration Dad, when will it ever end?

Damn, that is a very Good Question, and if you look back from my time til yours, Son, Mass Incarceration is here  
to Stay Lurking around the Corner with a number in hand waiting for the next Black Man or Woman! STOLEN IN  
the flesh, But Never Parted from Spiritual Son!

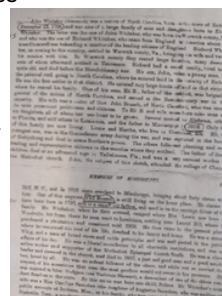
A Conversation between a father and one of his Sons!



PHIL AND HIS FAMILY WERE LISTED ON JOHN WHITAKER'S (SON OF  
SIS BERTON & MARTHA BRANCH WHITAKER) PROBATE ESTATE PREPARED  
ON 10/10/1857. THEY WERE LISTED BY FIRST NAME ONLY AND AS  
SLAVES OF THE LATE JOHN WHITAKER AND WIFE BERTHA CAROLINE.  
A TRUE & PERFECT INVENTORY OF THE GOODS CHATTELS & PERSONAL  
ESTATE OF JOHN WHITAKER, DECEASED:

FIL (PHILIP) old	A NEGRO MAN SLAVE	VALUED: \$
500.00		
EMILY	A NEGRO WOMAN SLAVE	
1100.00		
ALEXANDER	A NEGRO MAN SLAVE	1600.00
FRANCIS	A NEGRO WOMAN SLAVE	1300.00
MARGARET	A NEGRO WOMAN SLAVE	900.00
HEBE	A NEGRO BOY SLAVE	900.00
LUCINDA	A NEGRO GIRL SLAVE	600.00
DIANNA	A NEGRO GIRL SLAVE	600.00

LEE AND MELINDA WERE BORN AFTER THE ESTATE WAS INVENTORIED.  
THIS IS THE FIRST RECORD OF A FEMALE NAMED MARGARET, BEING  
RELATED TO PHIL AND EMILY BRANCH.







Rap Title: Listen. By Damondros Q. James, AKA "Dro"

**Hook**

Can you just listen?  
gotta get there.  
aye, love is the mission.  
we can get there.  
let god be my witness.  
You ignore me  
and that create distance  
We can see no stranger,  
when we listen **2x**

**V1-** Can I have a minute of yo time?  
I got something that been on my mind.  
First, I hope that you're doing fine  
know dat is ova time to cross the lines.  
But dis war dat we're in,  
is like a game of tugs.  
We don't see eye to eye,  
so you call us thugs.  
You push us away,  
we just giving hugs.  
We so sick of the hate,  
the real cure is love.

United we stand  
guess dat took a seat.  
Divided we stand,  
we all on our feet.  
Unitee so far under,  
like R.I.P.  
separation so vivid  
dats all we see.

Listen to wat I say,  
you can see the signs.  
Or keep doing what you're doing,  
being deaf and blind.  
Dat won't help us get better,  
just waste'n time.  
know dat yo liberation  
bound up in mines.

You're a part of me,  
I do not know yet.  
I am a part of you  
you do not know yet.  
Time is precious,  
I ain't talking rolex.  
We gotta start now,  
If we want to have progress.

**Hook, 2x**

**V2-** You can't understand me,  
if you can not hear me.  
See me as no stranger,  
don't fear, come near me.  
Everybody's not dangerous,  
we see dat clearly  
If we all could listen  
we could all love dearly.

I gotta story,  
I'm sure you do too.  
You listen to me,  
I'll listen to you.  
It's so much  
dat simple lil act can do.  
Or are you afraid to find out,  
I'm the same as you?

The goal for us  
is to love each otha.  
No big I's + lil u's,  
we are together.  
God above all,  
No one is better.  
But when we together,  
we can storm any weather.

Listen to me,  
I'm just here to give hope.  
I listen to you,  
to learn all dat you know.  
I'm hearing yo values,  
it's hard to let go.  
But we gotta re-set,  
in order to grow.

Then we could wonder,  
then reimagine  
How wonderful life could be,  
instead of tragic.  
All of it's possible,  
we don't need magic.  
Just people to listen,  
and change could happen.

**Hook, 2x**



Hustler's P.O.M.E./POEM to Being Autodidactic by Champagne Bibby

**A** is for ambition it's a key component to life when you strive for success in the many forms it comes in. Ambition can arise in a person when they seek to fill a void in their life may it be in their own person or whatever. Ambition I believe is in all being, we just have to go through certain shit to reveal it.

Ambition by definition means eager desire for success or power. Sometimes we can let our desires for things in life cloud our judgment in life's many ways: ambition at times or situations can allow you to sink or swim if your ambition has too much control over you.

Ambition is what I see in the characters I desire to emulate within myself, because I believe in the laws of attraction. Ambition is what I encountered the day I met the individual who would aspire my biggest investment I ever made in life which is myself.

**U** is for the unknowns in life we all have as ordinary people. Sometimes the unknowns can bring the best out of our beings. Or it can stunt the growth in us that's within us all. Unknowns to me have a perpetual life span that's immortal that can hide in the crevices undetected, or even in plain sight wanting to be known.

I was told you miss 100% of the shots you don't take, when an unknown looms in the conscious of a person who wonders about certain things they don't know.

It was a lot of unknowns the day I met the person who I admired. The unknowns about us as people is kind of what makes us unique and can peak the interest about us and our life story to be told to the unknown eyes and ears so that it can become known to those who need to know.

**T** is for tenacious and truth. Tenacious is what I needed in my fight for progress in my own intellect. Shit, I'm not going to lie the powers that exist that oppose our own will for something, even if it's for something that's just, can manifest its own tenacity to challenge us. But the saying "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger," I like this because I see in it reference to the books and math problems I had to learn to advance my knowledge on subjects I wanted to be better in, even though at times I wanted to give up. They say if you don't learn to stand for something you'll fall for anything.

Truth is what separates fact from fiction. Truth is a part of our beings we are ashamed of revealing to others because the fear of judgment or acceptance. Truth is what I couldn't ignore before I started checking my rearview of life to see it's starting to catch up and see it's gaining on me, so I decided to stop ignoring it and addressed it and came to understand the power in truth and now I don't see it as an enemy to my being.

**O** is for opportunity. I never approach anything in the style of having my hand out with the exception of receiving something. I rather ask for an opportunity because, I see it as a fair exchange ain't a robbery. This concept can remove the perception of a debt being placed on a person who's just looking for a chance. Depending on the situation an opportunity is all that's needed to be- the embarking of something great.

Hustler's P.O.M.E./POEM to Being Autodidactic by Champagne Bibby

(cont...)

**D** is for doubt. Doubt within yourself to progress or even seeing something coming into fruition is an enemy. Doubt can arouse fears and when fears come into play they keep all possibilities at bay from blossoming in your favor to work for you. The removal of doubt within myself has been an ongoing battle I deal with to this day. Doubt at times does some good because, it was necessary in some cases. But in regards to self I would recommend to all to remove doubt from within yourself because if you don't get out there and get what god got for you, you're going to lose out.

**I** is for individual. My individuality is what i had to prioritize. My individuality is what I learned is my majority make up, I didn't understand how independence and individuality co-relate and how it was up to the individual to want independence. My individuality would be what would stare back at me in the mirror when I would look in it. My individuality would be what got me here right now with the understanding that I stand on my own and it's not about who I stand next to.

**D** is for dedication. Dedication is what I displayed on my journey in life and for higher learning. Dedication is a peek at someone's drive and work ethic. Dedication produces results that show how serious and bad you wanted something in life for self. Dedication is hard work without the cutting of corners. Dedication is what I use as a motivating factor to keep going because I want people to see what it is when you see me.

**A** is for attitude. Attitude will dictate your perception and mind state. I had to be mentally prepared to take on the tasks at hand that were to come my way. My attitude would determine if I would stick to my plan of being strong and keeping positive thoughts flowing when I was around negativity. Your attitude toward things play a key factor in how a person surmounts obstacles, whether good or bad.

**C** is for courage. Courage is what I faced the music with. I stood there and didn't run from it. Courage is a characteristic I'm glad I incorporated into myself. Courage allowed me to deem myself as a hero for myself and others because I made the arduous decision to point myself as the face to be the epitome of hard work.

**T** is for time. Time is what it took for me to develop the skill set of being able to comprehend certain levels of academia or just life in general. Time was my biggest weapon given to me because it gave me time to stop and think. When I slowed down I was able to understand what I was going through, and it was a process I realized. Time is one of the most valuable gifts a person can give somebody because it's a portion of life once you give to something you can never get back.

**I** is for inspiration. Inspiration is what I wanted to become for the have nots. Inspiration can change the lives of people, when it manifests in a form that's relatable to themselves.

**C** is for champagne. Champagne is what I want when my mission is done.

AUTODIDACTIC

# Flyer Cypher!

(Dro):

Aye look up and tell me what you see?  
an airplane, wat else could it be?

A team of ambitious men,  
aboard in first class.  
Being chartered to the top,  
because they're higher than being last.

This a flight of many pilots,  
exclusive members, yeah we flying private.  
But got passengers on the radar,  
who can take us to the highest.

Been on it since the runway,  
this flight is a one way.  
It could be dark cloudy skies,  
and we still will elevate.

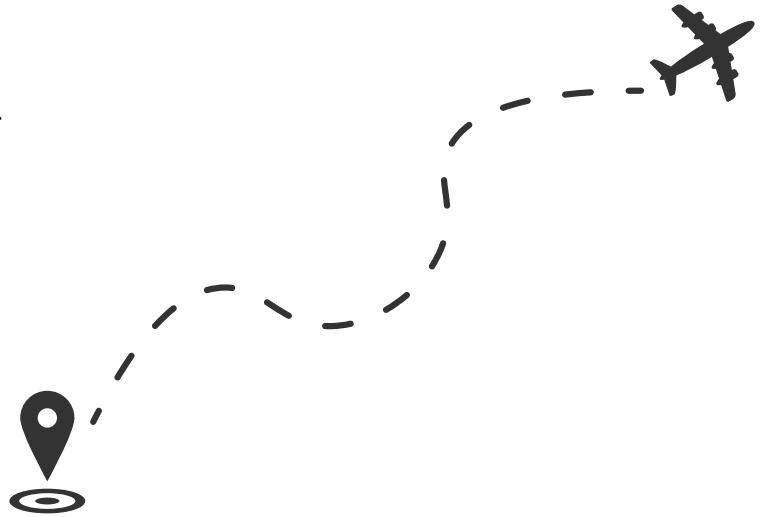
Staring out the window,  
from thousands of miles up.  
Tunnel vision on the landing strip,  
won't let nothing distract us.

If we meet any turbulence,  
the engines will pick up.  
Keeping our wings steady,  
yeah we ready, ain't no giving up.

So you have to respect it,  
or to the left is the exit.  
I just told you what it is,  
so you don't have to guess it.

So ima ask one more time,  
look up and tell me what you see?  
Since you put it that way,  
it's a fly over take over to me!

I flied over  
now it's time for Alex to take over.



STAY SAFE  
*Squad*

# Flyer Cypher!

(Alex):

They need to take cover from this  
Air Raid,  
'Cause we show out like Shohei.  
From here to Tokyo  
We're diamond-studded and we mow  
'Em down wit' our jet spray.

It's the take over!  
Yeah, I said it--  
It's the take over!  
We so fly,  
We pull the jakes over.

The king has fallen  
The queen is calling  
Fella called checkmate  
Now the chess game is over.

Quan drops wisdom bombs  
Panchito is the Don  
And we can't forget Svondo,  
He's our articulate napalm.

Last but not least  
It's the hoot of all hoots  
Our residential owl.  
You better be careful  
because JJ might intimidate  
you with his intellectual scowl.

We keep on humming like we  
Jet blowers  
while the enemy hopes for this to  
Blow over.  
But our standards and our altitude  
can't be lowered.  
We so cold,  
This fly over made hell  
Freeze over.

I'm ten toes in with these Lewis  
Flyers.  
I'm not even the co-captain of  
this Fire Cypher--

I flied over  
Now it's time for Devon  
to take over...





(Devon):

Let it be overstated that we  
defiantly soar over sanctions making  
grand statements not to be ignored but  
even more framed and hanged decorating  
famed halls of life

Lewis U aeronautic space station is where  
we study and prepare for navigations  
the destination is a new school of thoughts where  
it is taught, an evolving heart  
co-pilots soul transformation

This match can't be matched nor mocked  
we be sonic boomin', zip zap zoomin', swooshin'  
breaking sound-barriers by virtue and voice  
crumbling draconian forts, our altitude  
ascend above and beyond the higher ups.

Astrovisionaries dream lucid  
star-field cruising past the skisms because  
we acknowledge we all be cosmic  
so the logic is: if there's anything to fear  
it would be missing out on participating in creating greatness

Devon flew over-- it's time for Melissa to take over.

(Melissa): Fly it like we stole it even tho we own it  
essay in my notebook ima one that wrote it.  
Ethos Pathos Logos we know how they flo' bro'  
got my thesis statement an' evidence  
cuz my exigence is my excellence.

I flew over. Now it's time for Jay Jay to take over...

(Jay Jay): The take over, a new jail makeover,  
forget inmates, we students, roving like Range Rovers.

Taxing down the runways, our final destination  
has to be good days. Taking our seats, lettin down our food trays,  
as we assent, our wings spread like sunrays.

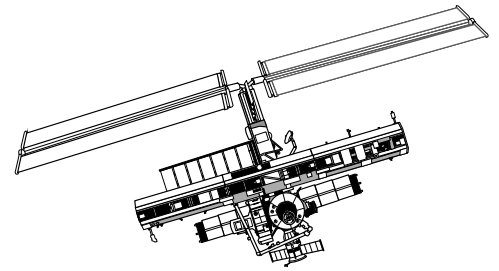
Shout out to our flight crew, they all have a job and they do what they do.  
Melissa came, and gave us the Flight plan. Ryan and Luigi are ready to help us expand.

Michelle is the captain of our air craft; Devon, Mike, and Alex  
help keep us on the right path.

We all the way up, so ain't no turning back, so we ain't  
gone stop til we get our degrees.

This was short, I didn't wanna go over. I flow over,  
Now it's time for Ryan to take over.

# Flyer Cypher!



# Flyer Cypher!

(Ryan):  
Flyer Cipher  
It's Ryan Miller  
the rapper killer  
Kamikaze fighter pilot  
author writer  
commerical airliner  
charter hijacker  
crashin' into skyscrapers  
like Carolina Panther linebackers  
turn the booth to a cockpit  
turbo boost till we make it  
through turbulence and airpockets  
G-force makin' 'em nauseous  
We Top Gun Maverick Skyrocket  
Interstellar go cosmic  
starship aeronautic  
till they blackout unconscious  
disoriented we're noticing  
all those opposing us vocally  
are ejecting and exiting  
but their parachute isn't opening.  
While heroically we rise meteorically  
hovering orbiting  
over evil faces  
yeah- Iron Man War Machine  
Jump got the drop  
We got the ups on the opps  
When we blast off liftoff  
and runway tarmac takeoff  
Apache helicopter propeller chop  
Comanche Black Ops  
launch sidewinders from spiral binders  
hell fires and Tomahawks!

Ryan fled over. Now it's time for Mike to take over...

(Mike): Flying top knots through hard knocks  
No knocks through cockpits  
Take control we radicals  
Trips south & west: Sabbaticals!  
Yeah Lil "B" my lil dude  
Seen 'em spit that jet fuel  
Inspired me on my mile high  
All naturell, what that do?  
New ideations, Institutions  
Internalizing a new nation  
Nose up but we down to earth



# Flyer Cypher!

On the outskirts of these plantations  
I educate, innovate, duck the hate  
Flew over  
Landed safely on the tarmac  
Got Zo waitin in the Range Rover

(Zo):

They want'd me on this cypher  
It's Zo with the ol' skool flow  
Old man on Flight  
God makes it tight  
He has the master plan  
Palms get sweaty from all the  
Claspin' of hands.  
We tell it like it is  
Gauging the pressures of life  
My Rhymes take flight  
God makes it tight  
So let the Haters continue  
their gripe.  
I Flied over, nwt it's time for Quan to take over.



(Quan):

Aviators, minds elevated.  
Flyers initiated  
cruising altitudes through education  
correcting stigmas of societal errors by graduation  
seeking knowledge from cradle to grave  
Transformed cells into colleges  
colleges from coffins  
Legislators are afraid  
Opportunity to manifest success  
Hope-filled we enrolled with Lewis right away



Awaken in the home of the sleep and  
the land of the enslaved  
Flyers take red pills  
Unplugged from matrix  
crossing enemy lines of carceral minds  
who build and outline communities.

Babies miseducated  
school to prison pipeline  
mothers and fathers incarcerated  
knowledge is power when applied  
knowledge is key, to unlock destiny  
knowledge is wealth, dwell in abundance  
fruitfully dispense truth

Quan flied over; let's let Fella takeover.

# Flyer Cypher!

(Fella):

It's time to pay the piper  
So let the lifer in the cypher  
'cause I'm about to move this  
Make every word spit, like it's bird  
Ish, Hit the windshield wipers.

Game changer like Bryant Dez  
Black and Proud like I don the fez  
Knowledge dispenser like candy Pez  
I'm Air Force One, they call me Prez.  
Y'all think it's a game  
but that's not why I came  
I'm here to listen, to follow my vision,  
and execute my mission  
Get that cred behind my name.

If you can't understand  
I feel sorry for you man  
'cause it's Freshman October,  
and it's already over  
On a high but I'm sober  
Tell 'em to cue the band!

Toast to e'rybody out there grinding,  
trying to get better...trying to get  
right...and trying to get home.  
Make 'em see you!  
(Wakanda Salute)

Fella flew over so Michelle can takeover.

(Michelle):

Yo, look down and tell me, what do you see?  
A ground far away, what else could it be?  
This flight a one-way, shared day,  
Divergent rays, makin' a spray out of no way.  
New riders, old timers,  
Fly or die-ers, pickin' up outliers!  
Resistance to persistence,  
Ducky's flyin' the distance.  
Two 50 Cent Pac-ages,  
EMIN3Ms and CupcakKes.  
Cuz food on the flight is Rapper's Delight!  
Intellectual tail spins, emotional head winds,  
We Double Up in trouble, together in the struggle.  
Horizons before us, always victorious,  
We twin, we win, HE>i in the end.  
This flight a one-way, shared day,  
Divergent rays, makin' a spray out of no way.  
Yo, I'm gonna ask one more time, look down and tell me, what do you see?  
Since you put it that way, it's a fly-over take-over to me!  
Squad out! And...Catch y'all in traffic! 🤪





## Trivia with Officer Lucas

Thanks to Officer Lucas, the whiteboard by Sarge's desk in the education building at Stateville Correctional Center is put to good use. Officer Lucas offers puzzling questions that get anyone checking in for the day or stopping by the desk to think hard. The questions on the white board encourage conversations among community, and we are grateful for (and puzzled by) these questions, we'd like to share them with *Feather Bricks* readers. Thank you, Officer Lucas!

- 1) I have keys, but no locks and space, and no rooms. You can enter but you can't go inside. What am I?
- 2) How do eight 8's add up to 1000?
- 3) What English word has 3 consecutive double letters?
- 4) What has 10 letters and starts with gas?
- 5) It's shorter than the rest, but when you're satisfied you bring it up. What is it?
- 6) The more more there is, the less you see. What is it?



## Nutrition: A conversation with Officer Watts

The past couple months, I (Prof. Melissa) have had the honor of connecting with Officer Watts at Stateville while in the process of being escorted back to the school building for study halls. When I mentioned to Officer Watts that this issue's *Feather Bricks* theme was how parts work together to create a whole, he offered to author a column on nutrition. Officer Watts shared the following tips related to how you can make all of your meals count to keep your whole body happy and healthy:

- 1) Stay away from soda/Coke/Pepsi/pop products. Officer Watts told me hasn't touched those in years.
- 2) According to Officer Watts, all you really need to prepare healthy food is a juicer. He explained that he gets most of his hydration from fruit juice, or "90% fruit and 10% vegetables" to be exact. Officer Watts' favorite fruits are watermelon, mangos, and kiwi.
- 3) Aim for a plant-based diet. Officer Watt's says his diet is "98%" plants. If he eats rice, he eats wild rice. He also eats walnuts and garbanzo beans. He does save a spot of cream (dairy) for his coffee.
- 4) Officer Watts recommends, "Like the seasons change, change your diet." One way to do this is to try one-day fast of liquids only. "I did it for a weekend," Officer Watts shared. He also mentioned completing a 20-day water fast and a 45-day juice fast and does not regret it. He said he did feel a little weak, but his body got used to it, and he emphasized the mental aspect as a positive to the point that he aims to fast every season. "You owe it to yourself," he told me, when I confessed that I had never done a fast before. He did recommend loading up on fruits before the fast.
- 5) Don't forget your toothpick :-)



# THE AMPLIFIER

with Alex Negrón



The man in the mirror. Scripture tells us there is nothing new under the sun. The same can be applied to writing. What makes writing unique is the techniques used to reach one's audience with what they wish to convey. Francisco, A.K.A. "Panch the Great," uses "the man in the mirror" to tell his story of going from the bottom to the top in a way that fits his style to harness his voice of relentlessness. Often, we as writers want to just show where we're at today, but it's the arduous journey of where we once were that captivates the audience. He does this flawlessly in this narrative essay.

Pancho is just one of the 16 examples of what it looks like to have a squadron of liberators with one mission, and one goal to become parts of a completed whole.



*Francisco "Pancho" Martinez is earning his B.S. at Lewis University in Professional Studies.*

Letting Go of Me, Seeing Myself and I Became New! By Francisco Martinez

It is easy to mourn the lives of those we encounter throughout life's journey. Entering Cook County jail on the new for the case I'm currently serving time for, I ran into a familiar face; this familiar face was facing the same charges as me, murder in the first degree and attempted murder, and we were from the same neighborhood, knew the same people, shared the same age and birth date.

We easily wished we'd chosen better paths, developed other talents, worked harder to stay out of jail, loved better, handled finances more responsibly, been more popular doing good things, but instead we made a living being proud of the bad things.

I forgot the person's name, but I remembered his Cook County number for some reason. We held conversations in the bull pen through process for hours, talking about better choices we could've made in friends, better work we could've done to better provide for family and ourselves, the children we abandoned for our choices, the beautiful women we could've married instead of just using them for pleasure.

It isn't difficult to brainstorm all this good talk with a sober mind and regretful thought, to wish we were different versions of ourselves when the time feels too late, different versions of ourselves that others who loved us wanted us to be, our selfish ways let them down, our tunnel vision took over our running towards tragedy fast and hard!

But it isn't lives we regret living that are the problem of being our own worst enemy, I think, for me and this guy; it's the regret of not being properly educated, with a format that applies to know how to be an educated asset to my own community and strive. Instead we were taught to dream big without realistic strategy, with only the hope that someone would help us get there with their checkbook.

It was at that moment I had an epiphany looking around that bullpen of clueless faces, blank looks that didn't even know their fate, that same fate that awaits them in their next destination. It was then that I looked at the face of this guy known by his number and told him straight up, "I think this is the last time me and you are gonna be seeing each other in these messy situations together." He looked at me, tilting his face with a lost look and no response, and I then told him, "I only need one person, one existence. I don't need you in everything in order to be everything, because real talk you got me nowhere."



# THE AMPLIFIER

It was at that moment that I saw myself die looking at my reflection in a bullpen bathroom mirror, a wraith, a doppelganger, a revenant. From that spot where I was standing, I looked up at the ceiling, as if it was a window to the sky above forever and ever. Past the stars and galaxies of endless space I thought of God, hoping that in this moment I can tell him to be my guide from here on out. In the 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says, “Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun.”

Even though I watched my old self die, he still haunts me before my eyes. I still had to accept the darkness of life we once lived together, not as a failure but as a part of totality, to create positive relief, growth, and suing the death of my old self, as burnt ash in the soil that is slowly molding into solid foundation, that will now be good to grow good fruit. With this process I began with a daily regimen of workout routines, incorporating calisthenics six days a week, using water bags as weight or old books and magazines, one day of rest by fasting, and I began doing correspondence in Bible studies, creating a solid foundation in faith, for mental stability cannot go wrong with a strong body.

My daily regimen helped give me a head start to stay busy during lockdowns; my workouts eliminated benches and actual weights, so my gym was in a cell or a day room. When I wasn't being a gym rat, I was corresponding through my Bible study courses, reading history books on my roots about Puerto Rico and Mexican culture, National Geographic Magazines, Newsweek; anything having to do with educating my brain and advancing social skills was positive change. Robb Report and Dupont Registry help out, too.

My journey from Cook County got me to NRC with 30 years ahead of me to do, and I sat in NRC for a year finding solutions to overcome failure. I wasn't trying to understand life, only trying to live life now, more potential and more realistic longevity is my goal. One might've went psycho doing a year in NRC, but I'm living proof that it can be done!

“In most circumstances you are greater than things or the conditions encountered. Whatever you aim at, be certain of winning, aim high, aim well, keep an ‘I can’ attitude, and you will succeed and win.”

From NRC I made it to Menard, got into courses for certification in Construction, and also through correspondence started Emmaus Bible study courses that certifies me to practice internship in ministry once I have completed all 196 books, that I'm still doing since 2015. I made it out the pit of Menard and its depressing grip. I landed in Lawrence in 2017. In Lawrence I got my certification in mentorship, my certification in Hospice Care, enrolled into Blackstone Institute through correspondence, completed lifestyle redirection and anger management. In 2021 I made it to Sheridan, but with all good things come tragedy. I lost my mother in October of 2021.

Losing my mother made me reset and question what I really want out of life. The eyes only see what the mind is prepared to comprehend. We cannot unsee the truth. Truth is my reset that landed me in segregation. I felt the need to be alone; I felt the need to be away from it all, alone with me, myself, and God. Fast forward from October 2021's reset in seg to me now. I'm entering 2023 attending Lewis University, chasing a Bachelor's degree, even after being denied clemency for a time cut in February 2023. I know my mother would want me to strive not only to be a success, but rather to be a value to myself and the rest of my living family.



If I were to conduct a survey seeking to determine the least-celebrated position among all major sports, I suppose the punter might earn that distinction. Punters do not throw for touchdowns. Punters do not run for excessive yardage. Neither do they intercept passes nor do they tackle runners for a loss of yards. Technically, a punt signifies an admission of defeat. A team that punts concedes that their offence cannot make the line to gain.

The paradox? The punter sees himself as essential to a team's success. His skill set allows him to more precisely place the ball in an advantageous location, in order to adequately suppress the opponent. If a quarterback or linebacker attempted to mimic the feat, even if they rank among the top of their respective positions, they could not expect results similar to that of the designated punter. For that reason, the punter will celebrate his contribution, despite the negative views often given towards his position.

In the Christian Bible, the structure of the church community stands in comparison to the human body. Though each part operates under its own function, regardless of how necessary, some get more recognition and celebration than others. Through this allegory, the lesson teaches that though one may not hold the office of priest or deacon, they still serve the body with the talents they possess.

Likewise, if we seek to tabulate our value and the most favorable math compares us to that of the hairy-knuckled big toe, we do not need to feel downtrodden. Though not often celebrated for its beauty, that appendage serves by adding stability to the body. Those missing that particular wholeness, while able to survive, will wish for a return to completeness because now it must work harder to balance. So go ahead, celebrate your contribution; you serve the whole.

#### Response to 4th and 10, and your Own 20 by Steven “Mr. ESPN” Feagin

As a former football player (running back to be exact), I would definitely agree that the punter is the least celebrated position in all major sports. But they are very important to the team although they are not always celebrated. When it is 4th and 10, at your own 20 you are in need of a miracle and in this context it is your punter. The punter has one job to do and that's to push that ball as far as he can into the opponent's territory.

Just as the hand that catches the long snap would say to the feet, that attached to the leg that kicks the ball down the field. Well done. Thy good and faithful servant! The body is made up of many members with different functions but they all celebrate and are celebrated when each member does their part.

#### Sports with Sarge

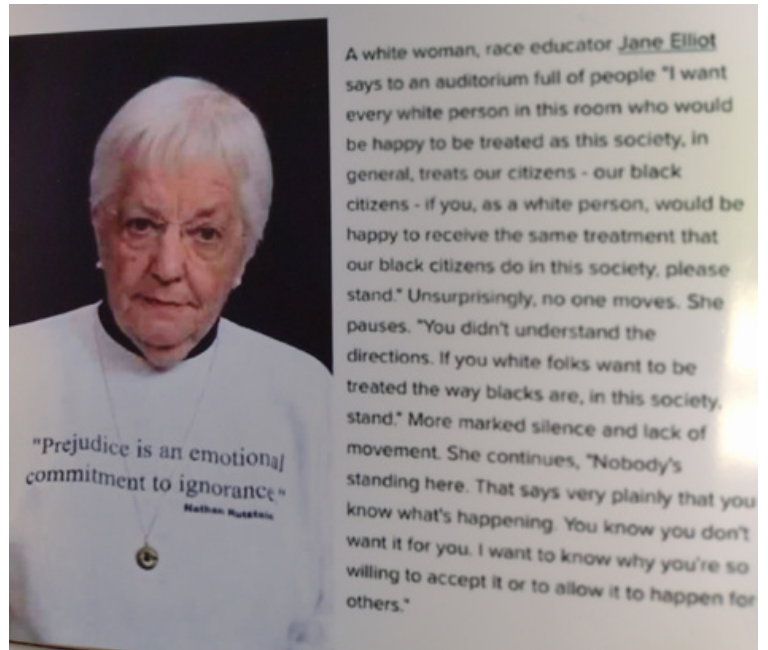
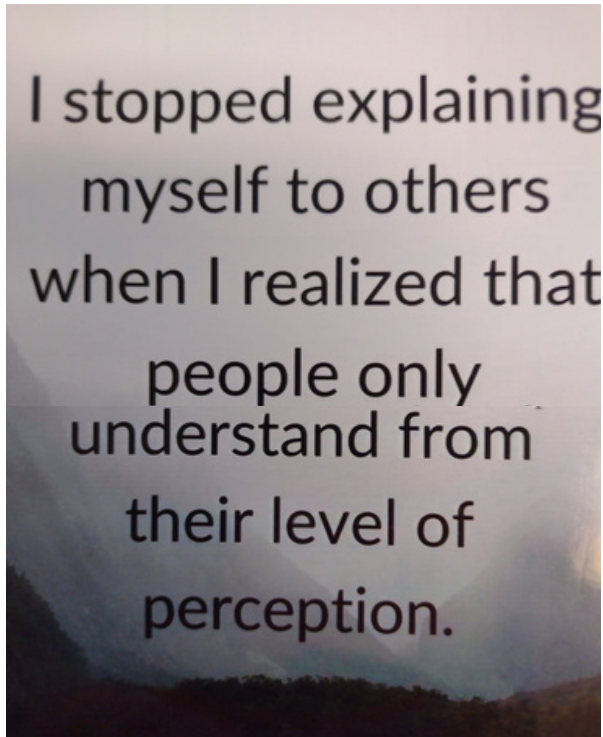
Before this issue went to print, I (Prof. Melissa) was able to catch Sgt. Brown and get him to break down Brian Norbeck's article (above) and explain a little more about the role of a punter. “I know you really don't know football like that,” Sarge told me, and he agreed to answer some of my questions about punters.

Sarge let me know that “You really don't know any famous punters because their significance has nothing to do with scoring.” He explained that the Punter is different and super-important. In other words, he elucidated, “Their significance is team-based rather than fan-based.” After talking to Sarge, I understood that you want the punter to put the ball in an unfavorable portion of the field so the opposing team doesn't make any big plays. By the end of the conversation, Sarge had me convinced that the last thing you want on a football team is a bad punter. A punter is important to defense. It doesn't take as many plays for the other team to score on you if you've got a bad punter.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT with Fella

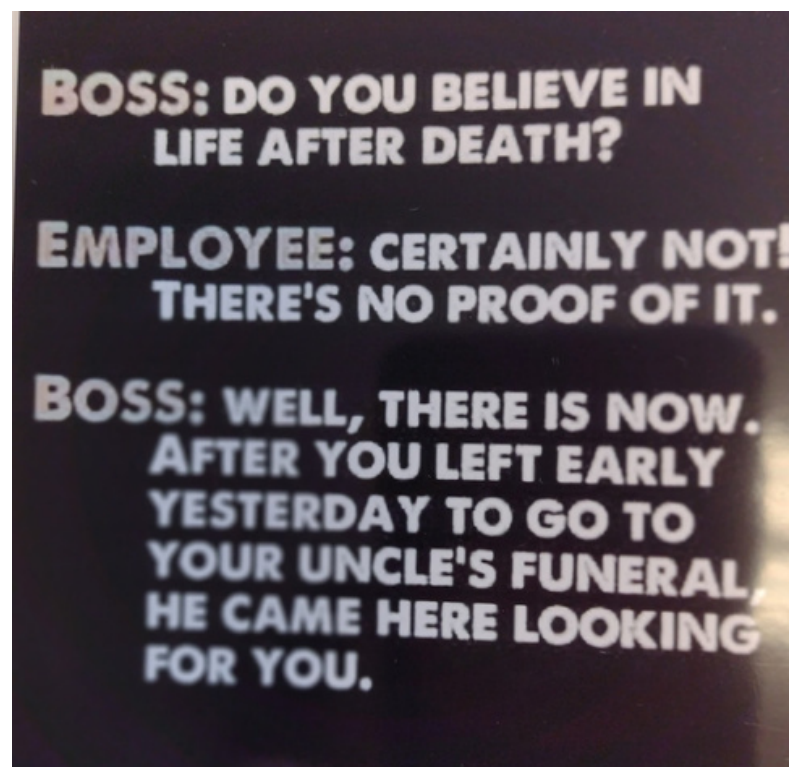
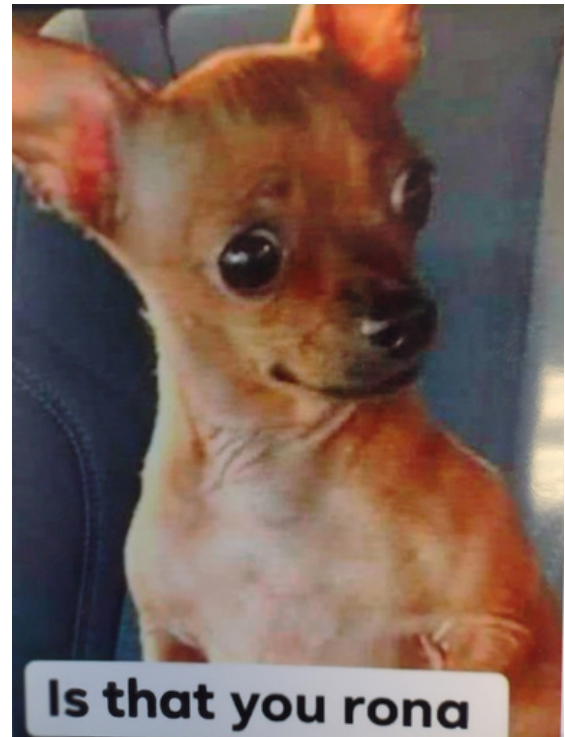
Let this sink in, and if it doesn't,  
read it over until it does.





## INTERNET HUMOR FROM AUNTIE LYNN

Every time I feel a tingle in my throat...







## Why should you be involved in your community? By Janis Elmore, Law Librarian

A community is a collective group of people who share one or more common interests or characteristics. This could include sports, community recreational events or leisure classes, family and friend networks, and neighbors. Without being aware of it, you have become part of a wide range of community groups.

Volunteering in community activities and events can enrich your life in way you could never imagine. Participation familiarizes you with your community and connects you to people and ideas that will positively impact your perspective for the rest of your life. It gives you the opportunity to grow as a person, to better understand how you fit into the world around you.

Being involved in your community can also help develop and strengthen your craving for a specific cause or activity. The more time you dedicate towards a cause, activity, event, or group of people, the greater your knowledge and understanding will be.

By making a community contribution, you are helping to make the lives of others better. This could be through meeting their needs or helping them overcome various social challenges or by sharing your knowledge, experiences, and beliefs with others. This can help develop a more well-rounded view of the world, which can be beneficial as it can teach others to be more understanding and accepting of diversity.

There is an abundance of ways you can contribute to your community. In fact, you're probably already contributing without knowing it, like shopping locally or supporting local charities like the American Red Cross or the local food pantries. When you volunteer to help your neighbors, especially the elderly, not only does it give you that feeling of gratification, but it also strengthens relationships. When volunteering formally or casually, you are making a valuable contribution to your community.

**Check out a few of our new reads in our Stateville General Library:**



**By: Brit Bennett**



**By: Maya Rodale**



**By: Amy Stewart**

## Trivia Answers

- 1) a keyboard
- 2)  $888 + 88 + 8 + 8 + 8 = 1000$
- 3) bookkeeper
- 4) automobile
- 5) thumb
- 6) darkness

# Shout Outs

**Infinity Thank Yous** to EFA Beltran, Officer Posey, and all other staff in the Education Building at Sheridan CC for your dedicated work and support of educational programming.

**Congrats** to those at Sheridan CC who have successfully completed their “Peer Educators Civic Engagement Course”!

**Kudos** to all performers from Logan CC, Decatur CC, and Fox Valley ATC who participated in Women’s Justice Institute’s “Look at Me 2023: A Dark Butterfly’s Shattered Silence” performances. Special shout out to Lindsay Anderson for her inspirational dancing!!!

**Much appreciation** to EFA Shayla Grantham at Logan CC for assistance with and support of North Park faculty’s use of media resources for educational classes.

**A Writing Center Extra Mile Award** goes to North Park SRA student Tremaine Mason for his impeccable attendance and steadfast participation in fall semester Wednesday study halls! Side note: Tremaine has also mastered learning all of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Keep up the great work!

**Big Thanks** to all who have been participating in the Parole Illinois “Letters to Legislators” Campaign in support of SB 3373, the Earned Re-Entry Bill.

**Shout Out** to Lt. Zematis in the school building at Stateville for keeping things running smoothly in the school building at Stateville.

**Welcome to Ms. Calimee**, EFA Costabile’s new Office Assistant at Stateville CC!

**Much appreciation for all writers who submitted work to this issue of *Feather Bricks*!** We received a high number of submissions, and we read and enjoyed every single one of them. If you submitted a piece that was not published this time around, look for it in a future *Feather Bricks* edition.

**Gobs of Gratitude** to EFA Costabile, Sgt. Brown, Educators Ms. Baez, Ms. Johnson, Ms. McGrath, all staff in the Stateville Education Building, and Public Information Officer Naomi Puzzello; we couldn't make and distribute *Feather Bricks* without your support.

**Call for Submissions!** *Feather Bricks* is accepting work related to pro-social behavior, positivity, and transformation for our Dec/Jan edition. Deadline: December 13. Submit to Prof. Melissa/Editor DeCedrick Walker/EFA Costabile at Stateville or to the EFA at your facility.

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/>