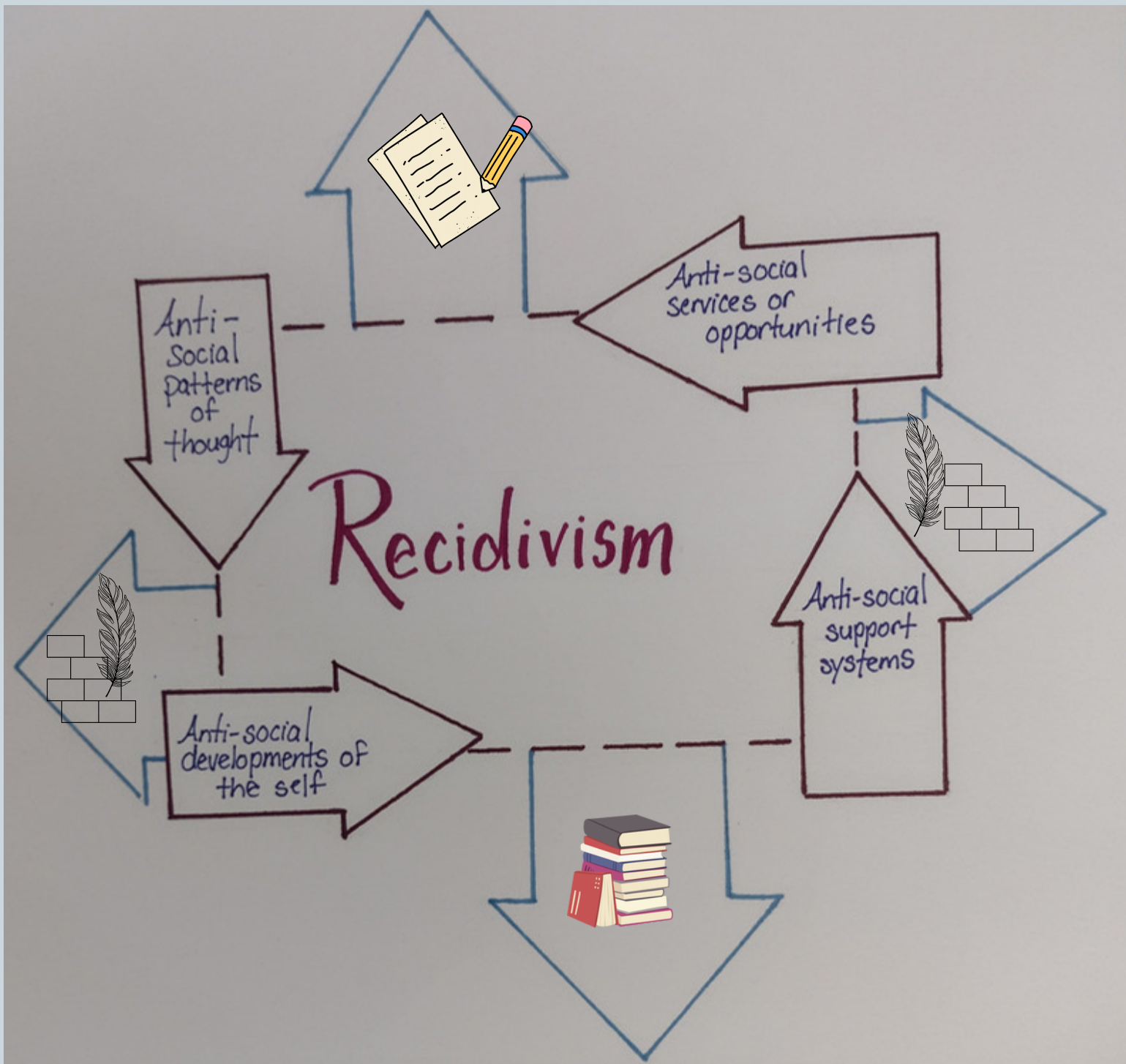


# Feather Bricks



Cover Art by Alann Vega

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

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Letter from the Editors</b> .....	3
<b>Parable Devotion</b> by Cayla Wheeler.....	4
<b>On Prosocial Behavior</b>	
Jamal Bakr.....	6
Nacho.....	7
Michael Broadway.....	8
Anthony “Talib” Bell.....	9
Matthew Rosario.....	10
Elton Williams.....	11
Joseph Ward-El.....	13
Willie Spates.....	15
William Peeples.....	15
David “Nazeeh” Bailey.....	17
<b>DePaul from Behind the Wall</b> with Alann Vega.....	19
<b>The Lowdown from Logan Chaplains</b> .....	20
<b>Here's a Thought</b> with DeCedrick Walker.....	22
<b>Poetry and Art Corner</b>	
Edmund Buck.....	24
Kenneth Ananyah Key.....	24
Jerel Matthews.....	25
Edmund Buck.....	26
<b>The Amplifier</b> with Alexis J. Santana.....	27
<b>Book Review</b> with Fall 23 North Park OT2 Students.....	29
<b>Law Librarian Column</b> with Ms. Elmore.....	30
<b>Cypher: Land the Plane</b> .....	31
<b>Shout Outs</b> .....	36

# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

If you're reading this edition of *Feather Bricks*, it means one of two things. The first is you got over the impulse to be elsewhere. Secondly, those who regularly read the content of this newsletter have remained patient with the vision of this platform in being inclusive regardless of academic accomplishments. Those who got over the impulse, we're grateful that you allowed us to capture your imagination with stories of growth and rhetorical agency. So, thank you for putting down the most interesting book you've ever read in your life. Ha!



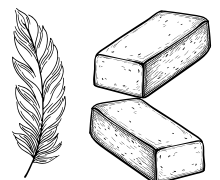
DeCedrick Walker

Most of our lives as incarcerated individuals hang in the nebulous space of rehabilitation, a term that's difficult to define by lawmakers but yet expressed with each step taken by us toward enlightenment and higher education. The vision of this newsletter to include creative, encouraging, and instructive expressions at its core presentation does not restrict who we are individually or collectively. Rather it allows the expressed nuances of ourselves, our voices, and rhetorical means used to specify our distinctions as an incarcerated community to be on display.

To our brothers and sisters at Lewis University, we salute you and we see you! Great job (on the previous issue)! That said, the Flyer Cypher continues. Only, in this edition we focus on landing the plane. 😊 No hard feelings. Nothing personal. Just good ol' rhetorical agency!  
-DeCedrick Walker

Happy New Year from *Feather Bricks*! Along with the vision of starting fresh, in this issue we bring you stories of a pro-social nature (regardless of whether or not you have declared, are following through with, or have already broken a New Year's resolution...or five). *Feather Bricks* editors are especially excited to share the writing by first-time contributors that we received on this theme, and we are equally grateful to bring back a few previously published authors here we haven't read from in a while.

From lowdowns to lyrics, devotions to cyphers, if you've got written work or visual art that is creative, encouraging, and instructive, *featherbrick* it on over our way. We would also love to receive responses to anything you read here for possible future publication, through bringing back our "Dialogue and Discuss" column.  
-Prof Melissa



**WRITE ON!**



# ***Parable Devotion***

**by Cayla Wheeler**

I would like to begin with a parable, if I may. Allow me to introduce the characters first. There are three characters in this story, each with a role – a responsibility of their own. Individually, they play their part, and collectively they make the parable. Three people – each with a different skill, a unique ability. Each one an equal value in the moral element.

We have Shiva and Shakti, the Divine (with a capital D) couple in Hinduism. Picture Ross and Rachel, Harry and Meghan, Travis Kelse and Taylor Swift (for you sports fans)...Shiva and Shakti are impressive! Shakti a goddess of compassion and Shiva a god of expansion – a man who extends that compassion of his wife. Finally, we have a poor man...a man in ragged, tattered, torn clothing. A man who has seen better days...better times. A fella I am certain we can each relate to at some point...and have probably been at some time.

Shiva and Shakti, the Divine couple in Hinduism, are in their heavenly abode watching over the earth. They are touched by the challenges of human life, the complexities of human reactions, and the ever present place of human suffering in the human experience.

I would like to pause briefly here. It is hard to look suffering in the face. Wouldn't we rather turn away? Steer it in a different direction. Fix our gaze on shinier objects. Human hurt is not easy on the eyes. Shiva and Shakti are troubled by this as well. Returning to the parable, as they watch, Shakti spies a miserably poor man walking down a road. His clothes are shabby and his sandals are held together with rope. Her heart is wrung by compassion. Touched by his goodness and his struggle, Shakti turns to her divine husband and begs him to give this man some gold. Shiva looks at the man for a long moment.

"My dearest wife," he says, "I cannot do that."

Shakti is astounded. "Why? What do you mean? You are lord of the universe. Why can't you do this simple thing?"

"I cannot give this to him because he is not yet ready to receive it," Shiva replies.

Shakti becomes angry. "Do you mean to say that you cannot drop a bag of gold in his path?"

"Sure, I can," Shiva replies. "But that is quite a different thing."

"Please, husband," says Shakti.

So Shiva drops a bag of gold in the man's path.



The man, meanwhile, thinks to himself, "I wonder if I will find dinner tonight, or if I shall go hungry again?" Turning a bend in the road, he sees something along the path in his way. "Look, there. A huge rock. How fortunate that I have seen it. I might have torn these poor sandals of mine even further." And, carefully stepping over the bag of gold on the road, he goes on his way.

## **Parable Devotion by Cayla Wheeler (cont...)**

Just like that, the man steps over his bag of gold. How many times have we done the same? Would he have noticed it if his name was printed in big bold letters on the bag? Would we have noticed it if it wasn't name brand...or planted in our path by someone we do not associate with? What if the content, the gold within, was so ridiculously shiny that the twinkle was too bright for this man...for us...to view without sunglasses adorned by our illuminated-without-luster faces? Would we recognize it then? Would we realize the bag of gold for what it truly stands for – a blessing, a well-timed, properly placed miracle, if you will? Or, like the man in this story, would we be not yet ready?

“Not yet ready...” What does that mean? “Not yet ready...” and how will we know when we indeed are ready? Who determines that moment? God? Ourselves? Not yet ready. That is the man in torn sandals, shabby clothes. He almost stumbles over what he thought was a rock; yet, it was a divinely placed bag of gold. Not yet ready. Worried about hunger, he missed opportunity. Not yet ready.

How many times has life, has God, dropped bags of gold in our own paths? Did you notice? Or was the gold in the shape of a word spoken? Was the gold disguised beneath a stranger's face? Did you see the gold for what it is...or did you mistake it for something else...a product-or-person of lesser value?

We've stood where this man is, stepping over and around, leaping past what we see as merely rocks in our path. Thankful that we noticed the pebble before it tore our shabby sandals, too. God drops bags of gold. Nuggets of radiancy in our paths, although they rarely look like what they are. Maybe your bag of gold has been a moment of breakthrough – triumph – healing. Did you recognize it? Did you feel it? Or...did you miss it? Lost in your own world, plagued by problems of the past? Perhaps your bag of gold was a “yes” when every sign pointed to “no.” Did you see it? Were you left in profound gratefulness, or did you deem it pure luck and carefully step over and around it?

In Mar 8:17-19, we read, “Aware of this, he said to them, ‘Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Don't you understand or comprehend? Do you have hardened hearts? Do you have eyes and not see; do you have ears and not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the 5 loaves for the 5000, how many baskets of leftovers did you collect?’ ‘Twelve,’ they told him.”

How often do we miss the signs? We have each stood (I know I have) where the man stood. Caught between someone's compassion, generosity, empathy, and our own foolishness. Stuck between God's bluntness and our own blindness. How often we miss the signs...turning a blind eye and a stubborn heart to our bag of gold.

God knows that we are blind at times...that we fail to see the tokens of His love...that we miss His given opportunities. God knows that we, at times, are wrapped up in daily life, dilemmas, and drama – we do not hear his message. He knows that we are often absorbed by family, friends, and even foes, and we neglect the signals. He is aware that there are moments we focus on games, gossip, garnishes, and we mistake, misread, misinterpret, miscalculate, and misconstrue his gestures.

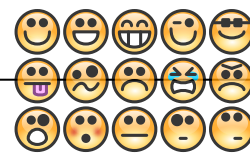
Yet he continues to plant gold in our paths. May we not be so blind – and dare I say – naïve to realize the gold for what it is.





# On Prosocial Behavior

By Jamal Bakr



Have you ever read a series of books or learned new concepts or theories that gave you language for what was going on inside of you and made the world around you make sense? For me, the concepts of toxic masculinity, emotional heritages, and attachment theory launched me onto a journey of self-inventory and actualization, which in turn transformed my ability to be in, nurture, and sustain healthy relationships. The following is an excerpt from a larger work involving the previously mentioned concepts and theorems.

“Out of all the traumatic events of my life, the neglect and ultimate abandonment of my mother was the most emotionally devastating, and left the longest lasting impact. Trauma and toxic stress had taken a toll on my body, mind and my ability as an adult to maintain lasting and fulfilling interpersonal relationships. Understanding that didn’t come easy.

For a long time, I believed that because I was “male” I did not need to “dwell” on the past. Any look back on it would only dredge up unnecessary negative emotions. I was wrapped up in being this “ideal” man, and a by-product of that ideology caused me to block my ability to feel. This not only isolated me from others, but it cut me off from healing too. That is the tricky thing about trauma; it either rubs you so raw that you feel everything, or it scars/cauterizes you and leaves you feeling nothing at all. I took the latter emotional capacity into my relationships.

I avoided intimacy and considered it pointless. I did not hold hands with my girlfriends; I even refused to let anyone touch my face. If I hugged or kissed, it was brief and only done out of a perceived sense of obligation. My wife once told me that I made her feel undesirable because of the forced nature of my displays of affection.

My platonic relationships did not fair well either. I kept everyone at arm’s length and avoided conversations that involved the divulgence of feelings. If someone “opened up” to me, I often became numb and remained unreactive to their bids for emotional support. In so many different ways, my emotional indifference mirrored my emotionally barren childhood. If I felt I was becoming emotionally involved, I suppressed it as best as I could with distractions. I was detached from my past and from the people in my present.

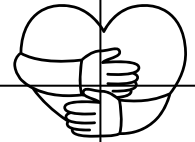
The inability to reflect coherently on my emotional heritage came to a screeching halt when I was confronted with the realization of just how rare my adverse childhood experiences were. I scored a “9” on the A.C.E assessment. It was what one in one thousand U.S children would score.

In that moment I realized that what I had experienced was not normal, and the way that I had disconnected from my personal history had severed me from any chance at having a normal future. It was then that I began to build a bridge between the abuse and neglect of my childhood and the interrelationships of my adulthood. This was the point in my trauma story when I began to iterate the events of the past with present realities, which in turn opened up the future to healing.

I discovered that by cutting myself off from the past and refusing to acknowledge the negative emotions that the past stirred up, I was in effect allowing that past to define the present and future. I had the preconceived idea that by ignoring those negative emotions, I was in fact “moving past” them. I lived in fear of those toxic emotions, and I felt that engaging them would compromise the sense of control that my emotional disapproving philosophy offered me.

Yet, by avoiding those negative emotions for most of my life, I had separated myself from the possibility of gleaning anything resourceful. I had denied myself a deeper understanding of who I was, who I could be and who I wanted to be. Despite the rarity of my experiences, I discovered that I did not feel alone in them. What I came to understand as I grappled with my past was that I felt alone because I had allowed the past to shape the relationships of my present.

I want to share from the author, Zora Neal Hurston. She said, in part, that a person must know something about the places and times of their origins in order to interpret the incidents and directions of their lives. In my case, it was me who needed to look back on the places and times I had been. When I did, with new eyes and a mind, filled with new language and insights, I finally took control over the direction in which my life was going, and where I truly wanted to be.”



## “The who, what and why of the Anti-“ by Nacho

Anti-social is defined as : “Hostile to or disruptive of the established social order; violating accepted norms.” There are more definitions to this word, but this one speaks most readily to me. Why? Probably because of where I’m currently socially and geographically situated. Society at large likes to label, and it has labeled us in these carceral paces as hostile and disruptive agents to the established order. But, how many “sociable” people have actually asked themselves the question of “why,” why have these particular individuals sought to traverse down this “anti-social” road? This, however, doesn’t mean that I’m excusing any type of “bad” behavior, but what I am saying is that people need to begin asking why.

Do you know that society has two very interesting components connected to it? Well, it does, and they are the ideas of reciprocity and association. The first ideal connotes a mutuality or cooperative that’s seen in the interchange of favors or privileges. It is the ability to engage in a mutual give and take. While the latter alludes to a common interest shared by an organized body. These two facets should characterize a society and the communities within it, but the reality is that not all within these “organisms” enjoy this concretely. Marginalized people, for example, within this complex “fellowship” are often subjected to a class dynamic that seeks to divest them of humane attributes. Marginalized people, therefore, and because of this false narrative, are not afforded the same benefits, privileges, and mutual interchange that should be afforded to all within this dynamic. They are left to fend for themselves because society is not accepting and receptive of all, and especially not them....

What do you expect the outcome to be when you’re treated as less than by a society that doesn’t value your humanity? Do you expect such an individual to acquiesce to the established social order and customs that doesn’t make room for them? Maybe for a time they will, but tipping points always come, and protests do manifest in various forms, and not always peacefully. The “anti” always shows up, and when it does, those under its sway are seen as evil, wicked, degenerates, corrupt, incorrigible, and as one doctor put it, “super-predatory.” In reality, these monikers are rooted in stereotypes and fears. They’re false placards placed upon a people by a fearful society who don’t understand that these divested humans have only decided to embrace and ingest the “antidote.” Sounds a little fantastical, but when someone gets fed up with having good old Uncle Sam’s size 13 boot on their neck, rebellion is inevitable.

Let me remind you that “anti” by definition is: “a person who is opposed to something, such as a group, policy, proposal or practice,” it’s a counteraction by a people who seek to neutralize certain effects. So, when an individual or group engages in anti-practices we have to ask ourselves, as a civilized and evolving society: why. Was that particular action taken in opposition to a policy or practice that was adverse to that individual or people? Or, how about if an individual for example is caught with narcotics, but the reason they’re caught with such a substance is in order to self-medicate a mental illness or undiagnosed PTSD that they can’t receive treatment for via conventional methods. Why? Because basic and adequate care doesn’t follow all within a society. The lack in the fundamentals due to classism, racism, etc. causing a vacuum that many try to fill and not out of want, but rather out of necessity. They engage in anti-social and criminal behavior in order to survive. To them, society isn’t a paradise, but rather a jungle...

I’ll close with this: society will always create and give rise to the anti-social. Why? Because that’s the nature of this group dynamic. It always needs to create an order, a class system, or a caste into which everyone can fit snugly into. But, reality and experience teach us that people will rebel, will protest, and break out of the suffocating boxes they’ve been placed into from birth. They will find a way to thrive in an organism that wants them dead. They will do so via anti-social processes that will be deemed criminal, but what would you do if the basic and fundamental tools needed to live are not present and never will be because of your status? Will you just give up and die or will you engage in the anti-? Remember, reciprocity and privilege aren’t for all...

I will end with this question that I would really like you to ponder, consider, meditate on, and allow to weigh heavily upon your mind: “Jesus Christ, how would He be classified, and would He be considered anti-social and anti-establishment?” Remember that he was rebuked by the “social order” of His time for eating and drinking with sinners, and He was even rejected and looked upon as a blasphemer, rabble rouser, etc. He was viewed as “the bad guy” by a society that wanted to control Him and desired Him to acquiesce to their will, which He didn’t....



### By Michael Broadway, Northwestern Alum

In March of 2010, I stood before a packed courtroom as a judge read from my pre-sentence investigation report detailing my upbringing and decided from the few incidents mentioned there in, that I was irredeemable, unremorseful and beyond rehabilitation, before giving me a “de facto” life sentence (75 years) for murder. After not bathing or brushing my teeth for nearly 24 hours, characteristics unlike me, I had to admit the judge’s stinging words had imprinted upon my psyche and were negatively affecting me; but were they true?

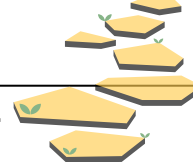
I wrestled with the question and began to recognize that maybe my decision-making process was completely flawed and that I was in a state of arrested development. That was the only feasible explanation for why at 38 years old, I thought the exact same way I did at 18 years old. The “de facto” life sentence had had a radical and transformative impact on me, and helped to focus my attention on a set of interesting factors that had shaped my thinking: anti-social patterns of thought, anti-social support systems.

Although there were other prevalent factors that contributed to my anti-social behavior in general, it is my belief that my thought process and my support systems went hand in hand, as people tend to surround themselves with like-minded individuals who share or reinforce their beliefs. My anti-social patterns of thought were in large part due to the anti-social ideals that came from living in a working poor community rife in violence, drugs and other crimes. I’m not arguing my involvement in any anti-social behavior was acceptable, because it wasn’t. But I’m arguing that to understand my anti-social behavior, we have to examine my environment. Because who I was, was very much about where I came from and how I ended up in Menard’s Maximum Security Prison. It was there, when I began taking classes like Thinking for a Change, Lifestyle Redirections and the Impact of Crime Against Victims Class (ICVC) that I began to dissect my behavior as abnormal. It was the ICVC class that started the hard introspective dialogue I had to have with myself. The conversation was honest, and I knew I had to untangle myself from the influential culture of my past, in which I had climbed to the top rungs of leadership. For me, the ICVC class made me realize that I was a victim too. This dramatically helped me to be vulnerable and to not keep up walls, or pretend I was never affected by anything. Two, this taught me to have empathy for the victims of my crime, but also myself - I learned to be gracious to myself. Three, there is no such thing as a victimless crime. Someone is always hurt by someone else’s criminal acts. And four, the power of restorative justice can be transformational for the victims of crime, but also for myself.

The radical transformation of my life may have started after receiving that “de-facto” life sentence, but my educational journey with the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) has given me a freedom that I may have never obtained, and that was the freedom to critically think, and my degree in social science that gave me the credibility that I could be rehabilitated. Philosophy challenged my morals, ethics and values, as I gained greater insight into how I thought about issues. Psychology challenged the systems I drew upon to justify my behavior. Availability heuristics may have helped me to survive in the hood, as it calls upon previous experiences learned through observations or exploratory methods to problem solve, which could be a “good thing” or a “bad thing” depending on the circumstances. Lastly, I found a home in sociology- the science of society, social institutions and social relationships. This was important in the untangling of my anti-social behaviors, because I learned the social conditions the community did play a role in how I thought and the survival methods I learned living in a poverty-stricken community, like Roseland, located on Chicago’s far south-side.

Roseland shaped me and how I thought about myself as an individual who used violence as a viable means to justify the ends. I needed to understand this way of thinking was not deviant, but a predictable outcome for someone who is juvenile in their thinking, but who can also be restored. I grew up fighting with one hand tied behind my back and blindfolded. Education freed my binded hand and untied my blindfold, and helped me to overcome my state of arrested development. And regardless of my “de-facto” life sentence, I’m already contributing to my community and to society of large in meaningful ways. I’ve spoken to at risk youth over the phone about anger, and how it’s a natural feeling, but to avoid making any decisions in that state, which at risk youth tend to do. I’m looking forward to other opportunities to give back and help someone.





## My Community by Antony “Talib” Bell

I was raised to be a criminal.

We didn't have much growing up, so my mother would teach me how to trick people into giving us things, steal and get away with it, and lie to get what was necessary; she raised me to think like a criminal. For example, when I was a small child, she would have me go into a restaurant and fake like we didn't get something we ordered, and when they'd ask for a receipt, I'd cry on command to bypass that obstacle; they'd give me what I asked for to get me to stop. To survive in this world she introduced me to, I had to be tough, so she taught me violence as well; when I was 8 or 9 years old, I came home crying about getting beat up, and my mother took me to that kid's house, made his mother step aside, and had me fight that kid again. Those lessons were confusing to me as a kid, because it was contrary to what I was learning from school, other kids' parents, and social institutions; it got even more confusing when I'd get praised for getting away with illicit acts, and I'd get beat when I'd get caught, so I learned quickly how to be more covert. During those crucial times of socialization, I was developing anti-social patterns of thought.

It wasn't long before I graduated and struck out on my own; I found anti-social support in peers that thought like I did, and we did anything we could to make a buck. We worked as a crew and hit stores, we stole bikes and sold them back to the owners, and came up with charity schemes, tricking people into donating—I didn't see anything wrong with what I was doing. By the time I was 11 years old, I had been arrested twice for theft; my mother told me I was too much to handle and shipped me off to live with a father I hardly knew.

My father wasn't the criminal mind my mother was. He was a straight-laced military man, and he tried teaching me a different way; he got me into football, I got involved in church, and he made me work a summer job detasseling corn when I was 12 years old. I actually started doing well, but old habits are hard to break; I got into a couple of fights at school, got in trouble for cursing out one of my teachers, and was suspended from school a few times.

One night my father I got into a fight about my troubles, and he told me that I'd never change and I'd always be a criminal. I internalized that sentiment, and it became how I saw myself; I embodied it. I figured that if that was all people would ever see me as, then that was what I was going to be. It was that anti-social self-development that was most destructive, because it affected my self-worth; I spiraled, and it sent me down a path that resulted in a multiple stints in juvenile institutions, in and out of county jails, and ultimately in prison for first-degree murder.

In 2013, I became a facilitator of rehabilitative support groups at Menard Correctional Center, not because I desired change, because I was simply looking for a job, yet that was the turning point that launched my positive climb toward pro-social growth. During that time, there were 3 integral steps to my transformation that I can pinpoint as pivotal: 1) It showed me that I wasn't alone, there were others that understood the issues I was dealing with, 2) I gained a community of others who showed they cared about my well-being, and 3) I was given responsibility, and I became aware of how much my actions affected others and their positive transformation.

As a facilitator, I heard many stories from fellow prisoners that mirrored my own. I heard about the traumas endured during childhood, and how so many had people that gave up on them; there were stories about how people developed anti-social thought patterns, and anti-social developments of self. I could really relate to these people. Being in this environment, I found I wasn't unique, people struggled like I struggled, and I found comfort in that; it allowed me to talk to others about what helped, what didn't, and we started building a community.

With that sense of community came a collection of people who cared about one another, we really wanted the best for each other, and that manifested in a variety of ways; we would assist each other when someone was in need, we became each other's confidants, and most importantly, held each other accountable when we messed up.

As one of this community's leaders (facilitator), it made me responsible for myself and others. I realized I couldn't be teaching something I wasn't practicing. That would be disingenuous, and those I was supposed to be reaching wouldn't listen or think about change if I wasn't willing to follow my own advice. Another aspect of that leadership position was that it wasn't solely about me; if I did something wrong, it would be projected onto everyone in that community. Having that responsibility made me very aware of how my actions affected others, and it made me more cautious about what I did. It wasn't just about me, it was about us; I cared about what happened to my community.



### By Matthew Rosario



The fallacy or myth of rehabilitation is more than theory; it's a life experience. This fallacy is well-funded through "Correctional" facilities and is falsely promoted in platforms of politicians during election times and then ignored after the office is filled.

"Rehabilitation" is a mythological unicorn rarely seen in public places. If it exists, it exists in prison not produced by institutions, but through the talents of individuals-in-custody, of the men and women who want and work for better lives.

When we think of prison rehabilitation, we seem to think that the system currently implemented to confine individuals-in-custody is sufficient to transform the convicted into productive members of society, if they are even given the opportunity at a second or even fourth chance. But the truth is, our prison system is so far away from providing adequate rehabilitative structures that they are non-existent. There are very few vocational programs, minimal mental and physical services, and other useful classes, like computer technology.

Malcolm X once said, "Education is your passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today." Malcolm X (then Malcolm Little) went to prison a criminal, but left as an educated and motivated man. He chose to make his experience a positive one and rehabilitated himself.

Unlike Malcolm X, these names are not immediately known: Sullivan, Broadway, Watkins, Rios, Keller, Cumbee and Simmons are not world-renowned, but they too are pioneers in their own right. These men came together to "blaze a trail" for other individuals-in-custody, which I believe is nothing short of life-changing and beyond-transformative. Experience is said to be the best teacher, but an experienced teacher is much better. Who would have thought that a group of unpolished speakers could win the hearts and minds of some of the country's best educators and capture their attention enough to provoke them to also promote their greatest need: higher education?

Telling one's story is important, but authenticity is even more important. What made these stories extraordinary is that the majority of the men used a vernacular that is rarely used in an academic setting: Black English. It was perfect for telling their experiences, reaching their audiences, and showing a type of vulnerability that had never been seen in men in a carceral state. Black English helped these men paint a true portrait of their needs, ideas, and solutions. It also allowed them to speak freely and not continually search for words to impress their audience. In speaking in this manner as opposed to what many call Standard English, these men bridged the gap both socially and academically.

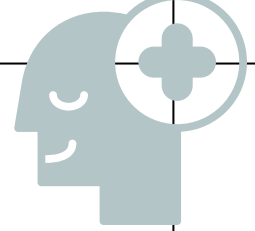
In the end, their voices were able to tug at the intellectual heart strings of institutions of higher learning such as DePaul, North Park, Northeastern, and Northwestern. These institutions encouraged them to begin educational programs at Stateville. This also spurred Prison and Neighborhood Art Project (PNAP) to immerse itself deeply into the community. It now acts as a breeding/proving ground for students who want to move into these programs. The ideas brought on these rehabilitative solutions, but they also exposed their need to "grab the bull by the horns" and further the rehabilitation effort.

It is clear that IDOC has, until recently, set aside their responsibility to rehabilitate individuals-in-custody. However, words and work also forced me to realize that when it comes to my goals and the things I strive for, I ask myself, "Am I in control of them or are they in control of me?" I'm in control of me and what I achieve.

That said, though their work is remarkable, there is still plenty more to do. There has been a strong foundation laid for higher education here at Stateville; programs such as ABE and GED could be improved with better teaching materials and technology. The same way these pioneers raised their voices to be heard for the higher education programs, someone needs to become a voice for these members of the community. Many of our Spanish speaking brothers don't have GEDs and can't pass a TABE test because of a language barrier. Bilingual staff could easily accommodate this situation.

In closing, whether it's Black English or Spanish being heard, it must be possible and okay. Being heard, we all will be able to say that we are taking our rehabilitation into our own hands and not allowing a politician to control the narrative.





## How to Effect A Positively Pro-Social Transformation By Elton Williams



In the Holy Bible, we find this: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the ox together; and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). A person might not be able to find a more positive, pro-social, or clearly

transformational scenario: predator and prey, the aggressive and the meek,

co-existing in inimitable comfort and peace.

Of course, we do not see this today because it is a prophecy describing what will be when the Christ returns to set all things right. But, what ought to be clear to anyone who has any sense of what it takes to reach an end, for the Christ or anyone else, is that two things must occur: the first step must be taken, and someone has to be willing to instruct (that is, lead by example) in the way that others must go.

The transformational scene illustrated through the biblical text saw the beginning of its eventual reality the moment that the Christ consented to take on the enormous task of redeeming humanity. His first step was to leave the comfort and safety of his father’s presence, coming to live in our dwelling place. When here, He instructed (that is, led by example), showing the disciples and others the sort of life He hoped we would learn to live. In doing these things, the Christ met both of the requirements necessary to fulfill God’s desired end, but the thing about transformation is that it takes time. In the case of humans, the added elements of dedication and determination must also be factored in.

As I mulled my process and the possibilities in respect to approach concerning this piece, I remembered Catherine McNeil’s *Fearing Bravely: Risking Love for Our Neighbors, Strangers, and Enemies*. Yes, that is a really long title :-), but aptly inscribed for a moment such as this. Sadly, I will not be addressing the contents of her book. Indeed, I want to share some of my thoughts about the author herself.

Catherine was an outside classmate of ours for a semester, taking Professor David Bjorlin’s Christian Worship course. To my mind, Catherine personified positivity and what it meant to live out a pro-social life: a mother of three children (with a husband to manage), a student with a career as an accomplished author, she stepped away from all of that, week to week, in order to enter a maximum-security prison, sit alongside, and learn with men convicted of and sentenced for various crimes. The lamb dwelling with the wolves and lions, indeed!

When she entered that space, Catherine was non-judgmental, courteous, and respectful. Her intelligent presence and vibrant personality lent itself towards enhancing the confidence and positivity among North Park’s second cohort students. As a part of us, Catherine lived out the life she writes about in her book with the really long title :-). Remind you of anyone?

The thing is, it wasn’t just Catherine whose actions mirrored what came out of their mouths, or what they wrote with their hands. It was almost everyone I encountered from North Park’s community. When I think of all that they have done, I am reminded of John’s final statement in 21:25. Theirs are the sorts of actions that allow us to at least begin to get a glimpse of understanding of how a faithfulness to the principles of positivity, pro-social existence, and transformation is endemic to the North Park community mindset.

I will be honest and say that I thought myself unprepared for the transition, leaving Stateville unexpectedly. The further south you travel in this system, the more dangerous doing time can become. I knew I wasn’t the Elton of days gone by, and though a small piece of him emerged in order to suppress that negativity, I understood that embracing that aspect of my former self (wholesale) would undo all the good work that God set North Park to help accomplish in me.

## How to Effect A Positively Pro-Social Transformation By Elton Williams (cont...)

The first night in Lawrence was rough. I arrived at dusk and went straight to segregation. The air was thick, hot, and oppressive. It was difficult to breathe. Dinner came, and the night was made worse. I went to bed, praying to God and asking, "Why this?" Then morning came with the songs of birds outside the windows of the room I was placed in and upon opening my eyes, I realized just how badly I had misjudged myself. I sat on the bunk, thinking on what I had just left, and understood that I had been prepared to step into this place, this moment, thanks to the very real care and concern I received from the members of my community. And this made it possible for me to hold fast that hopeful mindset and positive outlook.

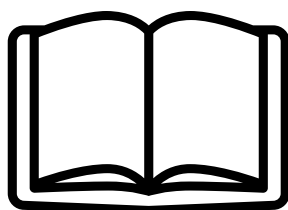
Though I found myself orphaned (so to speak) from my brothers and sisters, I never felt disconnected. What else could I do but honor that which God had so graciously bestowed upon me through the ministry as one of His many servants? I began to see opportunity.

It is here that I wish to 'shout out' Counselor Mitchell Erwin, who, after a single conversation, gave me the opportunity to carry on in the work of our mission of community building and restoration. His apparent dedication to the same has made it possible to share with you that I have stepped into the next phase of my evolution as friend, brother, mentor, educator, and restorative justice advocate.

I presently sit co-chair of an "Inner Circle Peer Mentoring Group" (as does William Anderson, aka '4-pound') and before this goes to print, I will have stepped into a role as Peer Educator in the A.D. to G.P (Administrative Detention to General Population). Before stepping into these roles, I had been tutoring mathematics ( $2+2=4$ ) on the wings and exploring concepts behind better writing, hoping to imprint a desire for more and better upon the young men here who may never see the opportunities that we who were blessed to be incarcerated 'up north' enjoy(ed). I've been busy.

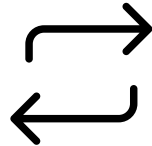
Of course, I don't expect any North Park professors, students, or alumni to be surprised by any of what I have written concerning my present state. It was you who built me up for this. It was you who introduced me to the possibilities that open themselves up to a person when they embrace a sort of universality regarding those they socialize with. It was you who helped me become cognizant of my need to take to heart more diverse ideas concerning the concepts of community. I will remain forever grateful for having met every one of you; you have made yourselves unforgettable and forever treasured.

Yeah, that kind of read like the end, didn't it? I couldn't end it there because I realized that I do need to address the content of Catherine McNeil's book with the really long title :-). She writes, "Find the community that will empower and support you as you, together, pour out your lives..." With all that brings taking the first step and leading by example (which all of you are guilty of). This is how you effect a positively, pro-social transformation in as many as may be receptive...by introducing them to community built and thriving upon these ideals. The positive and pro-social approach that you brought into my life has produced a more positive and more pro-social me, and this is a transformation that you should all be proud of having had a hand in fashioning.





## “Changing Folks, Changing Lifestyles” by Joseph Ward-El



In Alisa Thomas' and Shawn Carter's youth, they made several wrong decisions which led to their delinquency. Alisa and Shawn came into 'The Game' at fifteen years old. It took the tragedy of death for them to reach desistance from criminal behavior or "Charge it to the Game."

The development life course perspective applies to them. As VonWormer wrote, "The development life course perspective is concerned with four main issues in the study of delinquency: (1) the developing of offending and antisocial behavior, (2) the risk of later development in offending at different ages in childhood, (3) the effects of receiving a label of juvenile delinquent, and (4) protective factors and turning points that can lead to desistance from delinquent to criminal behavior." 1 How does this development life course perspective apply to Alisa Thomas and Shawn Carter? Alisa was getting into prostitution or "Tha Ho' Game," Shawn Carter and Hill were getting into "Tha Dope Game;" ladies first!

Alisa's older sister was already a prostitute. It didn't take much for Alisa to follow in her sister's footsteps. She wasn't with "Bein' Broke." Within five years, her sister was dead and so was her pimp. Learning of her sister's death and her pimp's death, Alisa stopped. She had enough of that lifestyle! This was her desistance from criminal behavior. Last I heard she moved back to Arkansas, got her GED, and took up some college. She became a counselor for troubled teens. Alisa could CHANGE – Can Help A Non-Caucasian Girl Evolve!

Unless kids decide otherwise, "Charge it to that Game." That's what Shawn Carter and Hill, his partner, did. You would think the negative effects would be enough to keep two fifteen year olds off the turnpike with a pocketful of white tops. But you'd be wrong." 2 They weren't with "Bein' Broke." Although Shawn was still on the wrong track, he had a friend named Jaz, who rapped for a living. He wasn't all that..."the wildest...about the whole thing was that the executives from EMI and Capitol who'd withdrawn support from Jaz's project were coming to me behind his back trying to holla at me on some solo shit...no honor, no integrity, it was disgusting" 3

Business as usual! News Flash, Shawn Carter! "Charge it to Tha Game!" This is your turning point/desistance and chance to start rapping; it's an honest living. Yes, he could CHANGE – Can Help A Non-Caucasian Guy Evolve! Shawn Carter became Jay-Z. Jay-Z became a popular rapper, a record label mogul, an entrepreneur/billionaire. As the saying goes, "the rest is in the history/record books."

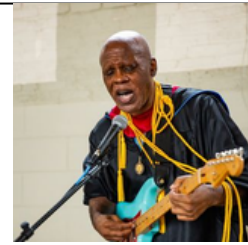
1 p.97 Women and the Criminal Justice System

2 p.15 Jay-Z Decoded.

3 p. 78 Jay-Z Decoded



## 'NOT Fully Human' By Willie Spates



Greetings eberybody! —most of y'all know dat I been out of action for a while with this covid thing going on. Thankfully I've had both feet above the ground for a least most of the time during my too long recovery- but I'se still here!

Anyway, I've got a little few things I wanna share after some interesting scholars like Rayon, Nacho, Melvin, Tall Mike, and a few others, so, s'cuse my punctuation, grammar and writing skills- I'm more interested in makin my points than appearing to be astutely, academically sound in my editing.

During a class called 'Social Work & Social Justice in a Multicultural Society, (PNAP- prof. Xochitl Guerrero), the person sitting next to me in class (Rayon), quietly spoke to me and said something to the effect of: "they don't consider us fully human." 1 For some reason his seemingly offhanded remark suddenly awakened me— as though someone pulled the fire alarm!

In class we'd been methodically learning and discussing the carrying aspects of 'systems of oppression', structural racism, concepts and definitions, identities, racial capitalism, and a whole lot of other good 'shi(stuff); which to me was somewhat an "old hash with a different gravy"— yet palatable and surprisingly good.

Anyway, I don't want to really rain on anyone's sunny parade of anecdotal/empirical examples of social harmony and egalitarian/equity symbiosms but give this old man your ear for a few lines of wisdom— "seraight from da cotton fields — 'down in da lower 40 acres!'"

Numma One— Rayon was on to something, and I immediately picked up on it. Though Rayon is a (R)eligious scholar— what he stated certainly wasn't religious, nor did it promote or cloak its meaning in some quasi-religious garble of 'kumbaya we's a 'obercomin'— while the massa's whip's trip breaks the sound barrier just as it touches the tender back of my hot sweaty neck, and muscle bound upturned buttocks!; so what is I saying , or trying to?

The American world, Christians and secular society needs a wake-up call!; perhaps a fresh unrestrained, "unbrainwashed" mind like this young scholar Rayon — and others I've noted. Fact check: there is no real truthful progression of a (Q)uantitative/Qualitative value, in social equity and progress— when accurately measured in the amount of (T) time; (E) effort; (S) sacrifice; (B)lood— lost or given by those who have fought so valiantly in these humanitarian areas, as I look back over the last 50 years— "so let us stop lyin and pretendind that alls well! — 'cause it ain't!

'For y'ouse Religious scholars who ask 'where's Jesus?', I answer -He's still there!, the question is where are you?- da- 'Choich (Church); other do-gooding liberal folks.

I'm startin to get mad, upset, and ramble, so let me quickly get on to makin my main point! To the powers that be '—social justice, (R)eligion (whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhism, etc.) means absolutely nuthin, "if", blacks, Latinx, Indigenous people- are not seen or acknowledged as "Fully Human"; and for the most part "are not". Let's get to it. The 'founding Fathers', and mothers too (da hand dat rocks da cradle)- were 'Deists'. Yessuh! Deists. They believed in a "form" of 'God' and supreme ruler of the Universe2— but the God they truly believed in and served, was "not" the God of neither the Bible—or Koran/ As evidenced by what they truly believed, lived, worked for and died for, their concept of (G)od/(god) —didn't, not believe, or hold that all men were/are created 'Equal'. Hence, I wonder at the hypocritical incredulity that many Americans go on to embrace, believe, indeed 'codify' that principle. My point, rather that point is proved when you look at the Nation's Constitution and Bill of Rights 'Jargon'— it frames quite clearly what they believe— (black folks'/humanity) is only 3/5 humans! There it is, people's-scholars!, 3/5 is not a whole- nowhere in the entire Universe!

There is a real danger and hidden timeless evil to this in many ways. "If", I do not see you as a fully human (Being), then I cannot, and will resist ever treating you as one; which includes affording you the full 5/5 (100% for y'all scholars), any rights, dignity, accords compassion, mercy- or humanity!

## ‘NOT Fully Human’ by Willie Spates (cont...)

OK!, so don't? — what is the wrong/danger? Then, I can treat you however I want, for whatever reason or whim— “without conscience or moral wrong”. 3) A human is consequently relegated to an: “object, thing, property, 3) negotiable instrument”; or whatever an evil disillusioned mind created as a carnate? Reality.

And folks d'ere it is— ‘A supremacist American mind/spirit has relegated a substantial portion of its dark skinned humanity to dat! This isn't about Religion, it's about Reality. Case in point—which is why for ‘yeas’ and years people like Martin Luther King and others’ appeal to the conscience, minds, hearts, and morality of others— in reality, mostly (fail)ed; because there was no true moral ‘equation/egalitarian standard/reality’ to justify, or sustain the reality that the embodied carnations among them (similar in design and human needs— were fully human! Hence no sense (admitted) of wrong or injustice done. 3) In truth we must put this ‘psychosocio’ reality class— “Nero, Hitler, Darwin, and many founding fathers/mothers”, in the same perditious category. OK. I'll say it, most Americans— Churches included!

So, in closing am I judging? — hell yeah!, and so should you! Why?, cause I would proselyte the faith driven belief and fact that Jesus “always” affirmed, and preached the humanity of others. Apostle Paul did the same proclaiming that, “there are neither male/female, Greek/Jew, slave) free, (cites scrip omit-check yourself) — it's in the Bible! Unless, one accepts Christ's words or at least embraces, and lives/acts upon those truthful Godly principles/precepts— ‘a human cannot, and will never see another human being as they do them(self). Treating others as you would have them do unto you have absolutely no value— all things other than one's own self becomes expendable fodder, objects, property; or carnate opportunity to satisfy one's own need for survival or gratification. 4) In this type of world only the survival of the fittest is considered fully human, or worthy of living— so, the question becomes are we willing to change or social, religious, and ethical/moral strategies to promote and fight for true social equity, justice and equality?; or hold hands, vote— “for the same political mindsets’, for another 50 years? I says hell naw... what did ‘Patrick Henry’ say— give me liberty, or give me food stamps? Now, let us pray ‘our Father who Art in Heaven...!

LUV- Uncle Willie

### Notes:

- 1)Espiritu, Yen Le. Body Counts, (“who is normatively Human”; “Genocide, slavery).
  - 2) Apostle Paul-cites omitted
  - 3) ‘No consequential punishment or retribution from God-or man! (Dred Scott
  - 4) Under this ‘cosmic’ scenario all matter both organic and inorganic on Earth, becomes in peril and threatened; hence personal ->social -> communal -> environmental -> Universal ...
- Willie's cosmic worldview.



### By William Peoples

I began under-age drinking and recreational drug use at 12 yr. of age (anti-social self-development). At that tender age I did not know I was “self-medicating”, seeking solace and oblivion from traumas I'd experienced for as long as I could recall. Being raised by a 17 yr. old divorced mother, abandoned and neglected by a 19 yr. old father, I had no viable “social support systems”; so I gravitated towards drugs, sex and the gang-culture. Drugs allowed me to forget, albeit temporarily, my pain of feeling unloved, under-valued, and unseen. The sexual trysts I engaged in with girls of my own age (two were 5 and 7 yrs. older than myself) were a way to connect with another human being, I confused sexual gratification with love, and so did those girls (anti-social support systems).

By William Peeples (cont.)



By age 17 I'd been expelled from Dunbar Vocational H.S., and enrolled in a G.E.D. program at Dawson Skills Center on Chicago's south side. My mother could no longer control me, and so she relinquished me to the streets. At 25 yrs. of age I was rightfully convicted of 1st degree murder, and sentenced to death by lethal injection. Up to that point my life had been fraught with let down disappointments, physical and emotional trauma, and drug addiction, so death seemed like mercy to me.

When I arrived on Death Row at Pontiac C.C. I was reunited with a former friend, a legend whom I aspired to emulate. Happy to see my idol, I greeted him warmly. To my utter surprise, he had disavowed the gang-culture completely, and spoke at length of his love and dedication to his Lord and savior Jesus (PBUH). I still revered him, he was one of the most feared and renowned killers I'd ever known, but I walked away thinking he's lost his fucking mind!

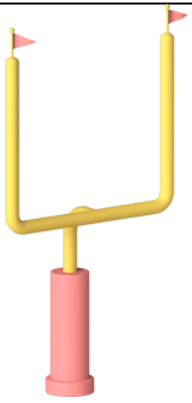
Within the span of a year's time, I, too, would lose my mind to grief, and self-negation! At the age of 43 my beloved mother died, and I spiraled into madness! I increased my usage of both drugs and alcohol, and got into violent conflicts with C.O.'s and fellow convicts. Finally, after a seriously violent assault on a C.O., I was charged with aggravated assault, and given "indeterminate seg.". Locked in total isolation behind the steel door I felt at home, and bowed to raise as much Hell on Earth as possible before they executed me, (anti-social patterns of thought). During this time, a younger fellow death row inmate, who followed nations of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, began sending me cassette taped messages of speeches of Farrakhan. One such message, "God's Healing Power", transformed my entire life! Prior to this, though I'd been reared in a quasi-religious house-hold, I felt no affinity to God or religion. I reasoned that if a god did exist, he cared nothing for me, so I hated him right back!

Farrakhan gave a compelling argument, and incentive for "self-reform". He called white folks "devils" and told me that my innate nature was godly, but through kidnapping, enslavement, and assimilation, the white devils had turned me against my "true-self" i.e. "a righteous Muslim". He taught me that Allah so loved me that he had come to the 'wilderness of North America and resurrected a messenger to call me back to Islam, the rightful way of life."

In less than 90 days I quit drugs and alcohol, stopped using profanity, changed my name to William X, and left the gang for good! Finally I'd found something (Islam) and someone (Allah) to belong to. I diligently studied the tenets of Islam as taught by the N.O.I., and began to conform my personality, and life-style to mirror them. All criminal and unethical practices ceased. I gave up gambling, lying, using violence only in self-defense, and totally stopped my ubiquitous use of profanity. I would eventually leave the Nation of Islam, opting for a purer form of Islam; but what I still carry with me to this very day is the belief in, and determination to atone for the senseless and brutal murder of a precious human being! My belief in Islam necessitated the obligation to observe and honor the inalienable rights bestowed upon everything, every one that Allah (God) created. Among these rights is the right of every living being to feel and be safe in my presence. I have an obligation, and a duty to not harm with my words or deeds. A very good example of this is an incident that occurred several years ago. I have always had a quick temper, and met any semblance of disrespect with immediate and brutal force. One day on the yard, during a basketball game, my opponent got angry and told me "Fxxk you!" My first thought was to make an example of him. As I looked around me, all eyes locked on the two of us to see how I would respond, I raised my hands in a gesture of surrender and said "This is just a game! I will not fight, kill or be killed over something that is less valuable to me than my own brother." As I walked off the court my opponent stood transfixed; he could not believe I just walked away. Later that evening at chow, he walked up to me, struck out his hand, and apologized in front of everyone in the Dining Room.

I have gone on to attain a Bachelor's degree from Northwestern University, enabling me to identify, assess and use the proper terminology to combat the anti-social behavioral disease that once governed my thoughts and actions, thus equipping me to inoculate others.





### Monkey in the Yard

by David Nazeeh Bailey

The day began as usual with this ten year old adolescent boy's excitement to go outside and play with the neighborhood boys, all of whom were Caucasians and I Negro. The weather was so beautiful outside for this particular November fall day, as a light jacket or sweatshirt was good enough.

Our family hadn't long moved into this large beautiful home which had a basement (in which my stepfather built a large bar, and an area for adults), first and second floor, plus a large attic that stayed really hot; with a two car garage and large yards on the side and back where I actually took care of our garden. We lived in a house in the Austin district that is no longer there, in a neighborhood which was all Caucasian on the north side of the street.

This was not long after the 1968 race riots throughout America as a result of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination (April 4th). This community was a giant step coming from a three flat apartment building neighborhood with no grass, not far from where Dr. King resided during his stay, protesting the racism and prejudice as well as discrimination in housing, equal and fair school and construction union jobs. I can recall always watching Star Trek with the Sista Michelle Nichols.

Anyhow, approximately twelve to fifteen of the neighborhood kids were playing tag football in one of the yards around the corner from my house, since it was a giant size. Then a thundering sound from the house back screen door slamming caught all of our attention. As we immediately stopped to see, there appeared a heavy set middle-age Caucasian lady. Nothing unusual or strange appeared about her. As we all glared in her direction, as she was interrupting the game, she seemed to intentionally pause to ensure we would all hear from her authoritative utterance.

She then shouted in such a way (that the birds in the trees were rattled), "Get that G\*\* D\*\*\* monkey outta my F\*\*\*\*ing yard! Y'all hear me?" And she flung around and disappeared as she had arrived, with the thundering slamming of the screen door.

Without much hesitation, we all went in search of the mysterious monkey. My own anticipation and excitement to actually capture and play with a real wild monkey was thrilling. Wow! I was looking everywhere as we all took part in the mysterious monkey hunt, not yet realizing the next event would rattle me and forever change who I was: one of God's innocent adolescent children.

We resumed playing tag football, and to our surprise that thundering and slamming of the screen door seemed somehow different as the woman again appeared. But this time she seemed to be a little different in that she appeared to be angry about something, which I could've never fathomed in my young boyish thoughts and experiences, which this would actually be the first of many in person racial and racist experiences that would soon follow.

Nothing had thus far prepared me for the grim, harsh, racist reality and need for God to rely upon, to draw needed strength as the thundering sound interrupted our play once again. To see her standing there as she pulled down her glasses to the tip of her nose as she braced herself, placing her hand on her hip as she began to hurl words

### Monkey in the Yard by David Nazeem Bailey (cont...)

directly at me in such an evil spirited fashion, shouting words which shook me to the core of my physical form, which have remained with me to this day. “Didn’t I tell y’all to get that G\*\* D\*\*\* monkey outta my yard?” and while pointing her finger directly at me, further added with hateful emphasis, “that G\*\* D\*\*\* N\*\*\*\* monkey right there!” I completely froze in fear, shock, and bafflement, never having experienced anyone hurling this type of racist epithet at me. I could actually hear my heart pounding in such a way and a fear which caused my fragile nervous system to react in such a way, causing a foul stench to egress from my body.

As I was frozen where I stood in what seemed to be a lifetime in a place far away, unknown and strange, as she brought me out of my stupor saying: “Now get, be gone boy, and don’t come back. You hear?”

I was too afraid to walk towards her out the front gate, the way we all had arrived. So, I began backsteppin’ and eventually turned and now I was moving in haste as I turned my head while still in motion to see if anyone was also leaving too. But, not fully realizing I was actually targeted, because I was the only Negro (Black) boy in the present location.

Once I was in the alley, they had already started back playing all except Wesley (who’d be only one of two of the boys I’d ever have the pleasure of playing with again.) As I seen he was just there kicking away at the grass in total frustration and anger on my behalf, as I’d learn from him later.

I hadn’t realized that the flood gate of tears had burst as I made it to the house. Now filled with mixed emotions of real fear, loneliness, confusion, anger, and feelings of being lost. So, I figured I’d hide myself under the front porch where it was closed and warm, where I couldn’t be seen (something I hadn’t yet done), and I cried myself to sleep while questioning God’s purpose and wisdom about the life-changing event, only to be awakened by ants crawling all over me.

For about two or three days I was really conspicuously numb, and my mother noticed that I wasn’t my usual cheerful, happy self. Nor was I out playing alone with my siblings. She comforted me, while clinching and kissing my face lightly and gently as she begged me to tell her what was wrong. And as I began, the flood of emotions burst again.

She reassured me that God had our backs and that we would sometime endure hardships as a test of our faith. She held me in her small, strong arms (although she was a very small woman), and I felt her strength, affection, love, warmth, and sincerity. I so often needed all of the above thereafter, dealing with the harsh reality of hatred, racism, and racial rancor.



# DePaul's from Behind the Wall

## with Alann Vega

Can you imagine being able to participate in the electoral process in the state of Illinois? We would hold the power to hold elective officials accountable, such as judges, state's attorneys and governors.

Can you imagine being able to vote at a federal level? With so many of us incarcerated throughout America, Donald Trump would not stand a chance of being re-elected as president of the United States. And perhaps we will hold the power to demand Joe Biden to correct his wrong as a contributor to mass-incarceration in America. As I encourage you to envision what it will look like to have the ability to vote, DePaul Behind the Wall is excited to share the announcement of the great initiative introduced as the Inclusive Democracy Act, an act sponsored by congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (MA-07) and Senator Peter Welch (VT), which will allow all currently and formerly incarcerated people to vote in federal elections. For more information, you can reach out to a representative from Stand Up America about their work to pass federal voting rights at [press@standupamerica.com](mailto:press@standupamerica.com).

Can we dare to imagine?

By: Alann Vega, DePaul Behind the Wall Think Tank Contributor



### Chicago Votes

Greetings!

Before we hop into our update, we'd like to formally introduce ourselves! We are Chicago Votes – an organization working at the intersection of activism and education to make democracy more inclusive, just, and accessible. Over the years, we have helped to pass legislation expanding voter education and access to people experiencing incarceration. In collaboration with the Unlock Civics Coalition and our colleagues in Depaul's Stateville Think Tank, we wrote and passed Civics in Prison in 2019, bringing peer-taught civics courses to people leaving IDOC. We also passed Voting in Jails, turning Cook County Jail into an official polling place and requiring other state jails to work with the Board of Elections to conduct an absentee ballot chase program. In addition to passing policy, we run tons of different programs, including voter registration inside Cook County Jail, court watching in Cook County Criminal Court, and other things like podcasts and more. If you'd like more information on our programs, please write to us at:

Chicago Votes

1006 S. Michigan Ave, Ste. 606

Chicago, IL 60614

Now, onto our policy update! Throughout 2023, Chicago Votes has continued our advocacy around House Bill 39, known as "Voting in Prison." We met with lawmakers, hosted advocacy days, power hours, and trips to Springfield – all in collaboration with coalition partners, advocates, lawmakers, and directly impacted community. Despite our efforts, and those of so many others, we did not get House Bill 39 passed this year. That being said, we have taken the time to reflect on our campaign, have important conversations with our coalition, and strategize with community members in prison. We are taking all these conversations, meetings, and lessons and crafting a new campaign for the same legislation in 2024. The language of the bill will remain, but we will be changing the name to reflect the connection between voting rights, community connection, and public safety. Have a name idea? Send it to us! Here's an example: Community Reintegration and Civic Empowerment Act.

Wishing you health and peace. Until next month, Chicago Votes

# The Lowdown from Logan Chaplains



**Leadership Academy Class 2023**  
**By Trish Columbo**



On Tuesday, August 31, 2023 Chaplain Sutton and Chaplain Moore graduated their first “10” leaders from the Logan Correctional Center Leadership Academy. The Leadership Academy is a vision realized by Chaplain Sutton who believed he could “cultivate our leadership skills and empower us to rewrite our narratives”. He designed an impactful one-year curriculum that includes four powerful leadership books:

Richard Foster’s Celebration of Discipline, John Maxwell’s Developing the Leader Within in You, The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, and Stephen Covey’s Seven Habits of Highly Effective Leadership.

Each Thursday afternoon Chaplain Sutton inspired us with presentations from our weekly reading and led interactive discussions. He did more than just have us apply the strategies and principles of leadership- he encouraged a growth in our mindsets- getting us to think, feel, and act differently. Each encounter provided us with valuable and life changing “nuggets”.

- Leadership is Influence
- We must Lead ourselves Before we can lead others
- People are the leaders greatest asset
- Leaders ADD value to others
- Leaders are motivated by service, Not power
- Example is the most important tool of a Leader

And so many more!

Chaplain Sutton challenged us with two thought- provoking assignments – our Personal Mission Statement and our Obituary. Our Mission statement helped us to define our priorities and identify who we are and who we want to be. On the other side of our Mission Statement was our obituary. The obituary assignment not only reenforced our Mission Statement – it opened our eyes to legacy. Not merely what we want our lives to say about us- but understanding that our lasting value is measured by succession.

One of our leaders-in the making, was given the opportunity to add another book to our curriculum, Ryan Leak’s, Leveling Up. She discussed the twelve questions Leak asks to elevate our personal and professional development.

Another of the many highlights of the Academy was attending via live-stream, the 2023 Global Leadership Summit. The theme of this years Summit was “Lead Where You Are.” For us, this theme reflected the Academy’s belief that leadership is not confined by walls but is a quality that can flourish even in the most challenging environments. The Summit introduced fifteen diverse and inspiring leaders from the sage Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Dallas Jenkins, the current creator and co-writer of The Chosen, a multi-season series about Jesus. Each speaker shared their own personal stories and leadership perspectives that truly inspired us to lead where we are.





# The Lowdown from Logan Chaplains



## Leadership Academy Class 2023 By Trish Columbo (cont...)

Our one-year journey closed with 4-sessions exploring mentorship. Chaplain Moore, using Howard Hendrick's *As Iron Sharpens Iron*, encouraged us to invest in the growth and development of another. One of the goals of the Academy is for each graduate to mentor another in leadership. Chaplain Moore provided us with foundational tools to guide and develop our mentorship skills.

I am confident that I speak for the entire Leadership Academy Class of 2023 when I say, Thank You Chaplain Sutton for your vision and confidence that we can be Leaders in our community.

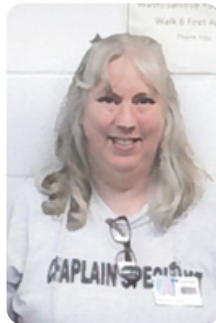
Thank You Chaplain Moore for your encouragement and for sharing your passion for mentorship. You both did so much more than teach us-you both empowered and challenged us.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Administration that supported the vision of our Chaplains.

"Leadership is the capacity to influence others through Inspiration, Motivated by a Passion, Generated by a Vision, Produced by a Conviction, United by a Purpose".



**April Goodman**



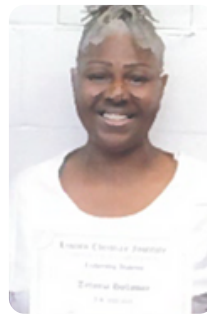
**Karin Hargrave**



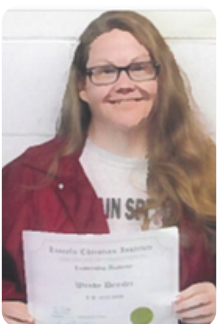
**Melinda Graves**



**Nicole Abusharif**



**Tyronza Holloway**



**Wendy Denzler**



**Yesenia Diaz**



with  
**DeCedrick Walker**

# Here's A Thought



On July 12th of this year, 2023, I was given an opportunity to have my clemency petition heard. I'd graduated and received my MA in Restorative Justice Ministry from North Park Theological Seminary on May 31, 2023 and I naturally felt that my degree would register to the clemency board members as a great representation of my personal growth and rehabilitative efforts. So, I felt great about my chances. The next day, July 13, 2023, I was summoned by an agent of IDOC to complete a Risk Assessment. I was taken aback by the timing of the summons because it seemed a bit strange. One would think that such a summons would've occurred before something so significant as a clemency hearing!

Prior to the abrupt summons, I'd heard of the so-called Risk Assessment from many of my peers who were assessed. Many of them were super-excited about measuring who they grew into against an algorithm that had been likely constructed outside of the reality of traumatic retention, which significantly contributes to anti-socialness, but was developed within a context that centers generalized biases as social guidelines. At the same time, regardless of my skepticism, I secretly imagined how I would measure against such a system mainly because I'd assumed the assessment would be based on who I had become since I entered IDOC in January of 2008. Man, was I wrong! It was very disappointing to learn my assumption was incorrect. Even more, my disappointment led to me becoming critical of the Risk Assessment process, which prompted me to write the following.

For those of you who don't know, when a Risk Assessment is given, an IDOC agent asks a series of rigorously fixed questions designed to prompt a yes or no answer. These questions range anywhere from the nature of the crime you're convicted of to asking if you would you walk away from a contentious altercation. The evaluation method of the assessment has a duplicitous edge to it because it frames questions through familiar sounding social principles that over the course of time evolved into "turn of phrases." For example, many of us heard of the golden rule that says, "Do unto others as you would want them to do to you." The evaluation method asks, "Do you believe in doing harm to others before they do harm to you?" This question was asked to me specifically, almost nonchalantly – in a way where the words "believe" and "harm" were almost inaudible, as if they were a natural interpretation of the turn of the phrase. Each question sought to uncover a specified anti-social factor which would then allow the algorithm to predict whether a person would have either a low, a moderate, or a high risk of re-offending upon his or her release. A prediction for re-offending then rests on the premise that the person who does re-offend do so due to an innate antisocial characterization. The likelihood of such a person re-offending ideally determines specified programming in order to prevent recidivism.

I don't think I would be stepping out on a limb by saying people who are committed to personal growth and rehabilitation would welcome and even relish an opportunity to demonstrate their new outlook and output on life. After all, the whole point of growth and rehabilitation is whether who I have become would fit neatly into both a narrow and ambiguous returning citizen socialization that requires my complete prosocial buy-in. I further do not think that in stretching the imagination by supposing those who are not committed to personal growth and rehabilitation are even aware that at any one moment – if summoned to complete an assessment – would learn the degree of risk they pose to society. Speaking from experience, I've come to accept that growth and rehabilitation are often responses to being deliberately, not inevitably, mature. In the context of a prisoner, maturity often looks like growing out of either one, some, or four major risk factors to recidivism. These factors are (1) anti-social patterns of thought, (2) anti-social self-development, (3) anti-social support systems, and (4) anti-social services or opportunities. That said, having criticized the evaluative method of the assessment, I will focus on the timing of



with  
**DeCedrick Walker**

# Here's A Thought



the assessment and why it matters.

It puzzled me that I was given the assessment after my clemency hearing because, according to the IDOC agent who had administered the assessment, it is a re-entry tool that was intended to be administered upon one's arrival at IDOC. Supposedly, this tool assesses what kind of rehabilitative programming would have a direct impact on the anti-social factor or factors that influenced the crimes that led to a conviction. Though I had graduated and earned a considerable amount of certificates, none of those things were considered prior to, during, or after my assessment. One has to think that had my assessment been given to me prior to my hearing, the board could've assessed whether I met the standard the algorithm projected. Basically, the assessment was given to me as if I had walked into IDOC for the first time.

What's even more alarming is that any degree of risk the assessment projects presumes an inherent inaccuracy and an ironic hypocrisy for two reasons. The first is a point I mentioned above, that I was given the assessment, after the hearing, which didn't take the evidence of my maturation into consideration. For example, I was never asked was I part of a street gang (which I was but no longer am). Nor was I asked about my current support system, which I had none at one point but now I do. The importance for this line of questioning stresses not only a departure from bad influences on the one hand. But on the other, the lack of questioning along lines of anti-social support systems or reliance on street gang assistance doesn't factor into my life's equation any influence that comes with having a positive support system. To take it a step further, the evaluation method doesn't find the person as much as it centralizes its biases.

The second reason is the method didn't take into consideration that my actions, like countless others, of personal growth and rehabilitation, occurred independent of any would-be program recommendations. In fact, as one of many who has been sentenced to life without parole or a de facto life sentence, I've been subjected to program discriminations prior to earning my GED. Thus, the audacity of restricting any evidence of anyone's maturation in favor of simply documenting that the assessment was given saves face but degrades the integrity of the evaluative method.

The salience of that last point is that acting independently of program recommendations shows how uninvolved the administration is in participating in the personal growth and rehabilitation of its residents. If you are not someone serving some semblance of a life sentence, you are likely worse off because programming – which is mostly offered to those with short sentences, does not directly impact the anti-social basis of the crime you were convicted of if you weren't given a risk assessment. Which, if evaluative methods are not given upon your entrance into IDOC, the anti-social factor that contributed to your incarceration will remain unchecked. Based off an underutilized assessment – if its projections are true – your future likely involves more incarceration.

Those of us whose only chance of being released comes through a clemency or a new sentencing hearing are proverbially crippled because we are guessing at what rehabilitation looks like for us individually. In other words, without a formal rehabilitative guideline – without a formal standard to measure our progress – we are merely left with guessing games. Don't get me wrong, our old selves and who we want to become are still standards we could measure our progress by. I would encourage anyone to develop a vision of the self they want to become and move toward that end. If our vision of who we want to become reflects a departure from the four major risk factors for recidivism that our old selves embodied, if we could demonstrate through story and documentation in our petitions that those factors are not active in our lives, IDOC and perhaps the courts or legislative bodies would have to develop an "asset to the community" model and discard the other one.



## The Stage by Edmund Buck



On the day I woke and truly opened my eyes for the first time and beheld the real world I saw: Behind me, the tribulations that caused this trauma became transparent. Before me, this tremendously treacherous trek with the treasure of enlightenment at its end.

I traveled many trails and trudged along through the thickets of my trials until I reached the stage where this was to all unfold.

I am a man that tends to be more temperate by nature, so naturally I was a little tentative as I approached this overtly turgid theater. There was this mounting trepidation that seemed to tempt my tepid temperament.

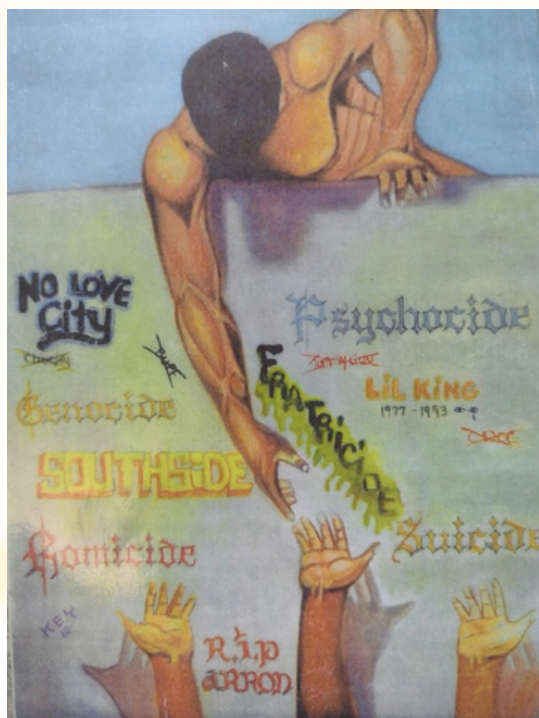
Something was definitely different here. There was turmoil in my mind. It felt like a storm was raging, twisting and turning my thoughts. Rationalism and emotion became entangled and this conflation caused me to thrust myself through that threshold which made my tabernacle tremble with a seemingly tactile temerity as I raced, terrified, toward the top of what turned out to be a towering inferno.

It's at troubling times such as these that I tend to consider this theory of how the tactless tactics employed by a truculent father, during my formative years, must have tainted and tarnished the tenet that was etched into the tablet of my being, and how the resulting tension may have tempered the template of my tendencies.

I had reached the top. At the apex I stood alone. Although tacit and tetches from a tapering tailspin I smiled. Because in that moment I realized the realness of my reality, and that clarity of mind comforted me. I tilted my head toward the sky and the sun warmed my face just as I stepped off the ledge.

In that instant I understood. And just before hitting rock bottom I think: How true it is that taedium vitae is truly tantamount to total tarnation.

### Featured Artist: Kenneth "Ananyah" Key



This painting, **"A Hand Up,"** is simply one's attempt to pull his brother out of situations that create a negative outcome, and, for many, their destiny.



The Personal is Political!

“Seveyn”

Nervously I sat at the table contemplating, was this a good decision?  
Exposing one so young and innocent to such a wicked and corrupt space, I felt guilty.  
I was against it, but Seveyn’s mom had her mind made up they were coming.

Her mom had made this trip on many occasions ever since she was a kid.  
The same as many other Daughter’s whose Dad was doing a bid.  
He went back and fourth because I didn’t want Seveyn to experience this hell but I also  
feared growing old watching her grow on photos while being confined to a cell.

I am her mom’s father and Seveyn’s grandfather who now will have to play the role of  
father to them both.

Trauma has already hit Seveyn while she was in the womb.  
Her father is not around, he didn’t go astray he got hit with a stray.  
He never got the chance to see her take her first breath or her first step. Is this  
generational or is it karma? Are daughters punished for the sins of their fathers?

This was the fourth generation of my blood taking this trip to visit a body with their  
DNA held captive in this place that has walls that sever the connection between parents  
and children. I made this trip too as a kid.

She was here, she entered on her mother’s hip.  
Scanning the room with eyes I see when I look at my reflection. All through my body I felt  
the connection.

I stood once they arrived at the table.  
Seveyn smiled and held her arms out.  
At 6 months she felt my energy.  
She knew I was her and she was me.

As I held her and looked back at her mom I could see my past, but I could not see any of  
our futures. Sitting in my face were two blessings. The room I was sitting in was a  
generational curse.

Her mom shed a tear that flooded my soul.  
Was it a tear of joy or pain or tear of fear?  
Fear of not knowing what tomorrow holds.  
Could she see an equitable future for Seveyn?

By Jerel Matthews

University without Walls Student, Abolitionist & PNAP Soldier

# Poetry and Art Corner

## The Reconstruction: By Edmund Buck

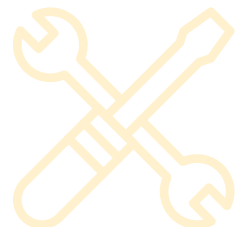
I'd like to share with you a portion of a story that's uncomfortable to tell  
Unfortunately this part begins with the death of a young black male  
There was an arrest, a trial, a conviction, and then came the time  
The falling dominos of a crooked game, nudged by the act of my heinous crime

Multiply a six by nine a thousand times and paint them all a sickly looking beige  
Facing the loss of myself as a boy of 15 until I was a man 35 years of age  
It was just another day as I sat there, locked away within the confines of my cage  
I sat there quietly, attempting to unravel the mystery of my rage

I thought about all the possibilities that were lost  
Contemplated why the price paid is never really worth the cost  
I thought about how the smallest things could make doing time so unbearable  
Contemplated how the decisions of a damaged child could create an event so terrible  
It was just another day as I sat there, locked away within the confines of my cage  
I sat there quietly, attempting to unravel the mystery of my rage

The time went by and my connections grew weaker  
Each day stretched on and on, becoming darker and bleaker  
How many times did I come to realize that that money order hadn't been sent?  
How many times was I forced to smell another man's excrement?  
Too many times to count, that is for sure, and yet I had to endure  
Or I'd have been driven insane from all the stress and all the pain or my jailer's unrelenting  
disdain until that one day came

So after 19 years and 6 months I was finally set free  
I eagerly anticipated the world I would see  
But I soon realize that the world as I once knew it no longer exists  
What I found in its place I will describe to you like this



Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!  
The only thing familiar to me was the bright blue sky  
The day quickly turned into night and I was filled with an agonizing fright as I considered my  
plight  
Succeed or fail, prosperity or jail, these are the possibilities upon which I now constantly dwell



# THE AMPLIFIER



with(out) Alex Negrón



While Alex Negrón is resting his amplifier over winter break, *Feather Bricks* invites Lewis University student Alexis J. Santana into this space and welcomes commentary from Alex Negrón on this piece (and a return to this column) in our next edition.

Criminal Minds  
By **Alexis J. Santana**

Does an education reduce criminal activity?

Some scholars theorize that providing inmates with academic writing skills reduces recidivism, while others claim reduced recidivism is not only achieved by an education but by the learning environment academic programs create.

I believe traditional classroom settings are major contributors to lowering recidivism amongst the inmate population because they create a conducive learning community fueled by respect, mutual acknowledgment and encouragement.

Writing studies scholars like Ashwin S. Manthripragada believe that providing inmates with academic literacy skills equips them with rhetorical agency. That by doing so inmates develop an awareness of their own actions and are better able to think their actions through.

Manthripragada assumes that criminal behavior is caused by inmates' ineffective communication skills. This theory was birthed by Manthripragada's encounter with inmate students; as Manthripragada states "some students mention that they have averted fights...because they have learned to deliberate before reacting on impulse" (Shelledy 5).

I agree with Manthripragada on the aspect that: a higher education helps individuals develop rational and critical thinking skills as well as challenges students to unravel their intellectual potential. But I disagree with Manthripragada's suggestion that advanced literacy skills automatically create higher morals. In Maggie Shelledy's own words, Manthripragada "fails to recognize the various social and systemic factors that contribute to criminalized activity" (6). Although providing inmates with literacy skills is important for intellectual development, moral development is achieved by different means. This is why assuming that education is the sole reason why recidivism is low, is only half right.

The environment created by the prison industrial complex is one that "belittles" (9) and is intentionally designed to make inmates feel "less than human" (9). These are two descriptions ex-convicts Ben and Saul make when describing the dehumanizing treatment inmates receive from correctional officers. Aside from the treatment; prison structure was built to degrade human nature. Within the pages of *See No Stranger*, Valarie Kaur conducts an interview with James Kessler; the architect of North Correctional Institution of Connecticut. Kessler admits that his design was built to "limit the environment" (201) and "stimulus" (201) inmates receive.

Instead of compelling inmates to make a positive change, Kessler's design, unintentionally, as Kaur puts it "brought out the worst of the worst in them and in the officers" (201). We must acknowledge the driving factors of violence. These factors are, as Danielle Sered states; "Shame, isolation, exposure to violence and the inability to meet one's economic needs." (67). When we comprehend the qualities that drive violence we can begin to understand why prison facilities are notorious for creating and fueling violence. By understanding the causes of violence we can begin to disrupt its cycles.

Traditional classroom setting programs create sanctified zones. These safe havens serve to



with Alexis Santana (cont.)

disrupt the perpetually oppressive milieu inmates are exposed to. Here is a quoted version of Lewis University's sanctified zone policy: "Accordingly, we declared the university campus to be a sanctified zone, a place and a people united in diversity. The active promotion of diversity and the opposition to all forms of prejudice and bias" (1).

It is moral ideals like these that help drive recidivism down. These qualities are what Shelledy means when describing Saul's experience "educational programs did not carry any social currency within the prison. But the quality of interactions he had in the college programs, the mutual recognition and respect mattered" (11). College programs hold no immediate value to the people under the oppressive foot of the truth-in-sentencing policy. There is no reward for us 85 and 100 percenters. Our reward is in learning, growing, and surrounding ourselves with positive like-minded individuals who battle against the oppressiveness of prison.

Incarcerated individuals' humanity is in constant threat. Judges, correctional facilities and the public cannot demand inmates to be good citizens by using oppressive means! College classroom settings play a major role in disrupting these cycles of violence. Just consider Saul's comment about life and the meaning of humanity "living is surrounding yourself with people you love, people you care about" (11).

My incarceration experience is no different than my incarcerated brothers and sisters. I too have had to fight for privileges, have been sold out by stool pigeons, had officers try to belittle me, been stripped naked for searches, etc. But none of this is comparable to the torment of isolation. Isolation has always had the uncanny ability to tear me apart and piece me back together, with each cycle losing a piece of myself; with each cycle, hoping it wasn't my humanity. Yet, when I attend class here at Sheridan I'm reminded of my humanity. My peers and teacher care; they care about my health and my success in class. They encourage individuals to host their opinions. They want to see people do better and if I ask for help I receive it without hesitation. Its recognition like this that reaffirms my humanity. I'm seen; I'm human, I'm a student, I'm more than a \_\_\_\_\_.

In conclusion, college classroom environments are far from perfect, neither do they hold any immediate regard, but they are an excellent way of disrupting violence. Disrupting violence in a place that is notoriously known for causing it becomes transformative. These atmospheres created by education programs are conducive in establishing a community built on respect, acknowledgment and dignity: qualities inmates take back with them to the outside world. This is what lowers recidivism amongst inmate participants of educational programs.

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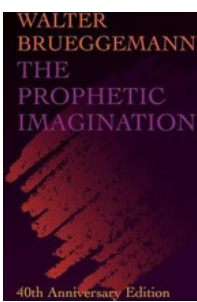
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# *Book Review* **The Prophetic Imagination by Walter Bruggemann**

Available on Amazon, in the Stateville resource room,  
or in an Old Testament 2 class near you.

At the end of fall semester, I (Prof Melissa) had the opportunity to sit in on Professor Will Andrews' Old Testament 2 class to listen to students' final presentations on Walter Bruggemann's *The Prophetic Imagination*. Without

giving too much away, I invite you to read some notes I took on these presentations, which motivated me to read this book over the winter break. I hope these notes might inspire you to add this book to your 2024 "must read" list. (And, if you are in North Park's Logan Cohort, congrats! This is a required text in your OT2 class with Prof Will this semester 😊). It is also interesting to note that these lectures were first delivered over 40 years ago at North Park University; our Brandel Library archivist is currently trying to dig up some possible recordings. In the meantime, here are a few things North Park SRA students mentioned in their final presentations on this text:

## **Chapter One: "Alternative Community of Moses"**

Tim Giles pointed out Bruggemann's claim of the difficulty to engage in prophetic ministry because of commercialism. Otha Anderson posed a follow up question that asked us to ponder how the story of Moses and the Exodus journey are portrayed not only in the Bible, but also in other historic texts.

## **Chapter Two: "Royal Consciousness"**

Peter "Justice" Lawrence summed up how Solomon's qualities contrasted to Moses', especially in terms of affluence, consumerism, and oppressive social policy. "Why did God allow Solomon to be King?" Joseph Boyce asked us to ruminate on, especially if God is "all-knowing"?

## **Chapter Three: "Prophetic Criticizing and the Entrance of Pathos"**

Ray Fergerson summarized the courage and power needed to think an "ultimate thought" in opposition to the kinds of thoughts accepted and promoted by the "royal consciousness" and asked us to consider "what would an ultimate thought be like?" Steven Ramirez read back from an absent classmate's written discussion on Bruggemann's unpacking of how Jeremiah exemplifies the imaginative qualities identified in the chapter title. Moreover, Steven suggested contemporary relevance of the text when he explained that when we choose Pathos, joining into suffering with others as part of our ministry, we are also choosing freedom.

## **Chapter Four: "Prophetic Energizing and the Emergence of Amazement"**

Tremaine Mason clarified how the prophet's job is to re-energize the people and bring hope by reminding people of God's love and mercy, rereading and rearticulating the old stories of Jeremiah and Second Isaiah hand in hand. In other words, Tremaine explained Bruggemann's claim that we need to always go back to the past in order to reclaim hope for the future. This kind of hope, Tremaine summarized, is a gift given to the people that can be accepted with amazement, as suggested in Second Isaiah. Michael King added that Bruggemann used at least 15 texts as sources in this chapter, and Michael claimed that "Jeremiah is the hope champion, in my eyes."

## **Chapter Five: Criticism and Pathos in Jesus of Nazareth**

Alonzo "Zôhariel" McCorkle emphasized how the story of Jesus in biblical texts and its emphasis on embodied grief is necessary for newness, and he outlined seven arguments Bruggemann offers to suggest how Jesus exemplifies the kind of criticism and pathos needed for prophetic imagination. Alann Vega explained Bruggemann's contemporary suggestion to substitute the phrase "royal consciousness" with the term "totalism" to make the text language more relevant to today's readers. Vega also called us to consider "Why don't we hear more about our call to be a prophet?" and followed up with questions like "How are we speaking God's truth to power structures or systems that do not reflect the will of God?"

## **Chapter Six: Engagement and Amazement in Jesus of Nazareth**

Jamie Snow connected the role of despair in this chapter to our own SRA community and pointed out how Jesus' words alone were "tearing down the old and building the new." George Ross emphasized the idea of Jesus' story bringing hope of a new beginning through resistance and dismantling. Gregory Reed commented on the relevance of this chapter by recognizing how each member of the SRA has started a new beginning by enrolling in an MA degree program and engaging fully in the hopeful possibilities that accompany the prophetic imagination and hard work needed to complete required coursework.





**How Do Libraries Transform Our Community?**  
**By: Janis Elmore, Stateville Law Librarian**

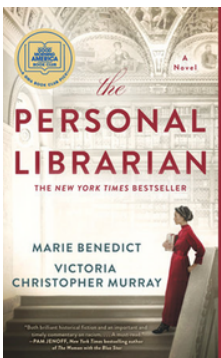
Libraries have evolved beyond just book repositories. They have become a community hub. What is the relationship between the library and the community? Libraries serve as an active community center that provides a range of spaces to meet various needs. Libraries are community hubs. They connect people to information as well as connecting people to people. They are safe havens for kids, providing after-school homework help, games, and book clubs.

Libraries can be the among the many stops parents take with young children, both for entertainment, helping with early literacy skills, technology, and more. Libraries offer knowledge and information to the adult community as well, through books, online, and digital resources. They have become the community “tech help” center. They also try to teach the public how to navigate the world of digital literacy as well as how to communicate with the government and economy as it becomes increasingly paperless. They help patrons find government documents on the web. Often this is the only place these documents are available. We also help patron search for jobs and fill out online job applications.

Libraries have become the “go-to” place to look up something quick or check out the latest movie release or new hot title or e-book. They also have become the gathering place to release tension as you meet with friends for yoga, Ti Chi, or Zumba classes.

So, how do libraries transform our community? A library can be a shared space where some of your closest friends meet to relax, talk, look up something “really quick” or just sit and relax with a good book. It’s a home away from home, no matter where you are.

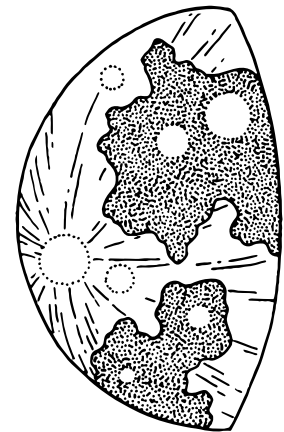
**Meet a few of the Librarians that service our community:**



Check out this great read:  
*The Personal Librarian*  
by Marie Benedict and  
Victoria Christopher Murray



Ladies and Gentlemen  
This is your Kap-ten speaking  
Devices off, seatbelts fastened  
I'm picking up bogeys on da radar beacon  
bout to hittem wit them evasive moves  
you Top Gun Maverick  
I'm inverting the enterprise of hyperdrive  
I got dem space force moves  
I'm Palestinian-No Hamas-you know what I drop  
got dem heat-seeking missiles of knowledge  
wit dem lectures locked and loaded  
so you know my intellect stay hot  
I'm staging a takeover  
with the force of IOG's  
I'm snatching faces off  
givin em John Travolta makeovers  
Hittem wit these words of mass instruction  
breaching the atmosphere  
reaching warp speed  
doing laps around the sun  
y'all tryin to start a firefight in the sky  
oh, that's nice  
we wagin intellectual wars in the stars  
and we want all da smoke cuz we ultrahigh  
just blazed you wit dat ultrasonic  
ya'll still doing arithmetic  
and we onto astrophysics  
No shhh...y'all be ultrasilent  
y'all ears is still poppin from a ride on da elevator  
we hittin speeds of mach-ten on the millennium falcon  
passing up shooting stars  
telling em, "See ya later"  
that's a commercial flight  
you sittin in coach  
we flyin by on rocketships sippin on academic jet fuel  
maneuvering a lunar landing approach  
I'm Vader and y'all my lil' Lukes  
I'm Kap-ten James Kirk  
So beam me up Scotty  
I just dropped them baby Yodas off at school!

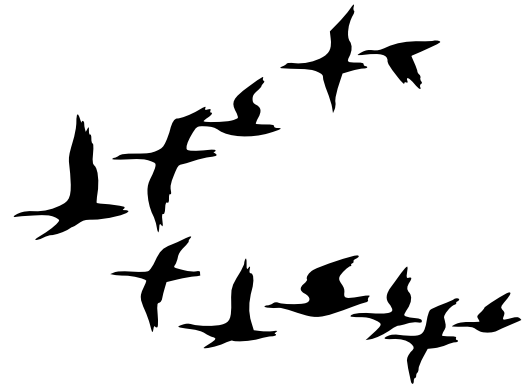


*Breaker Breaker? Kap's out and Ced's coming in hot! He's coming in Hot:*

What all the hoopla about loud talk imply you assume what I'm about  
like you maneuver how I route  
spitting mother's milk out the mouth hold your breath or get it capped off

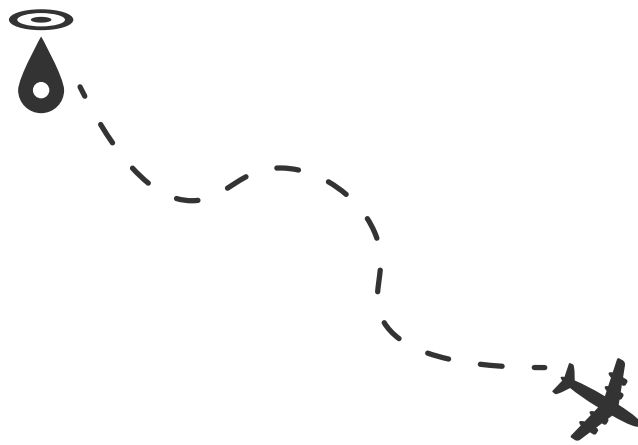
## Land the Plane Cypher

It took you to brag about flight to tick Cap off  
grown man language it's no room for brats to back talk  
Nuff said you too short for us to bump heads  
you dull with your puns cuz your point hit a rough edge  
I'm feather bricking how you flying with your feathers missing  
this edition is resurrecting from that dead edition  
suggest you listen it's rules to delivering flow  
your bird flight was just a slippery slope  
you might thinking in your mind "what they bickering fo?"  
I keep thinking in my mind "You don't get it and won't."  
It's just simple you talk like you crook cred there  
When you was here I never saw you and I looked everywhere  
You on a path that we tread our footprints everywhere  
Next time you feather brick know you in rare air.



*Emergency landing? Plane down. Joel "Yoel" Davis comin in to meet y'all on the ground:*

They say I got  
nice wordplay  
but that's absurd  
because I don't  
play with words.  
I don't know  
what y'all heard,  
but I don't flock  
with bird  
I disturb  
opposing state of minds  
with clever lines,  
that will have y'all  
going to Noah Webster  
to define, huh!  
All that talk  
about some booming  
and zip zap zooming  
got my analytical mind  
vrooming  
because y'all whole team  
assuming  
that aeroplanes  
can reach our plane and  
take over?  
Don't y'all know  
that we novas,  
so we brighter.  
We spirits,



so we lighter  
Anybody trying to expand  
need to know  
that we can get y'all higher,  
if that's something  
y'all desire.

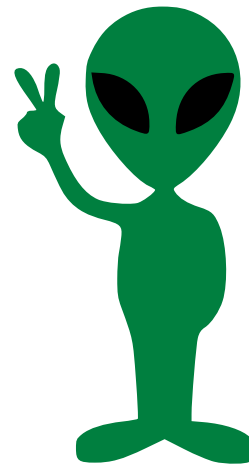
*Breaker Breaker! Next up's Nestor the story-maker:*

Move, Flyers, step out the way  
step out the way Flyers, step out the way  
Oh no the flight is out  
no runway, the lights are out  
Squadron step back we about to ground you  
*"oye como va mi ritmo bueno pa gozar, muchacho, oye como va, mi ritmo bueno pa' gozar"*  
You think you still flying, that's aftershock  
we dropping knowledge, here comes the knock:  
stories of mass instruction  
we got them all  
we are building bridges instead of walls  
we'll help show you again how to fly  
and take your writings to brand new heights  
our storytelling will make you laugh or cry  
that's how we do it, I like it like that, *"ole, ole, ole ole, I like it like that"*  
this lesson is over, this story se termina  
I leave you grounded  
yo tengo la gasolina.



*Breaker breaker? Let's re-begin. Clear the runway, here comes Lynn:*

I been waiting on this opportunity  
this not new to me  
illuminate the room  
suppress the goon innate  
remove the crest & ruminate  
refuse to rest, I move with haste  
spit acid-remove without a trace  
sit back & I'm super-8, alien  
I'm super great, avian'  
A super steep gradient  
I radiate ya radius  
I'm ray-venous  
I mean ravenous  
I'm wildcat-n-this  
I'm like katniss with hunger pangs  
terminate em / hunger games  
Fly over?

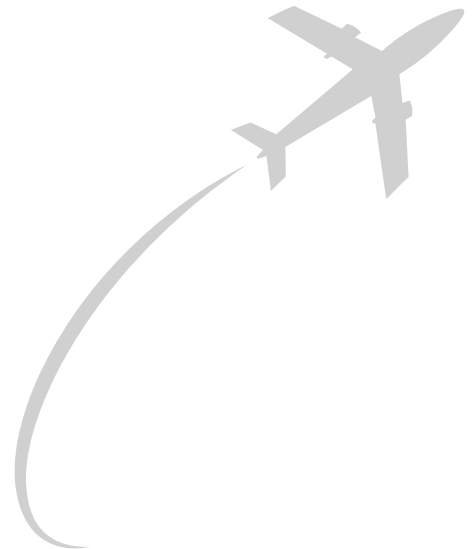


## Land the Plane Cypher

We running thangs  
Marathon  
run the game  
lyrically professing-all opponents  
recording the rawest moments  
They spoke-now we all up on em  
in they faces  
digitally in they faces  
critically anti-racist  
you characters weren't that persuasive

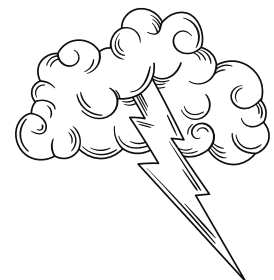
*Breaker Breaker! Twin turbos free an' next on the tarmac be Lil B:*

See street smarts and book smarts go hand to hand  
on the D-line since "99" like I play for the RAMS  
sitting in prison with a degree shouldn't change who I am  
been spinnin blocks way before they was riding spinners on rims  
The way I bossed up, u should have seen it with your own eyes  
thought I was a pelican the way I flown by  
or may it be you got the wrong guy oh yeah its own nah  
aint no fighter jets we flying drones nah  
stackin deadprez they think Im mimickin Mt. everest  
Im all about a sack I'll turn green like Hassan Reddick  
went and purchased a 3 bedroom for bond leverage  
and shorely watch me cruise to the top - gun maverick  
Ima savage, Im dope for Zoë Kravitz go broke  
you want democracy establish a vote  
Im like loki off vikings Just buliding boats and recite quotes  
I aint refrenceing somersaults just simply take notes



*Breaker Breaker! Manny might need space to move! Might need space to move:*

Yo Kap-Ten & General SED "BEAM ME UP"  
Half vampire, half werewolf - Im a Lycan-  
Is it a bird or a plane - No...it's a WildCAT and Viking.  
You are about to experience a bad storm filled with lightning - Fasten your  
seatbelts, the turbulence is frightening -  
I heard they had a Cipher Flight full of emulators, well...  
This is a restricted Air-Space reserved for innovators -  
Made for creatin this "Prison to School" mantra:  
up, up, down, down, left right, left right. (B) (A), (B) (A), select start-  
30 men like Contra. Guardians of the Universe  
from your back door monsters.



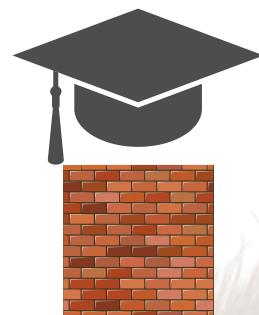
*Fasten back up and clear the sky - in fly Rayon super high:*



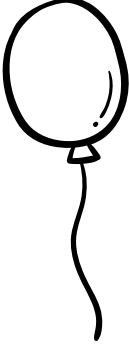
## Land the Plane Cypher

Rayon is sooo fly! How fly?  
So fly...that the wind delays its flight plans when he approaches  
Signal di plane! Signal di plane!  
You foreign friend a come tru.  
Not an optical illusion,  
but no cypher is complete without a tropical solution  
I am the topic and conclusion  
Ain't too high on local check ins.  
So call me Mr. International check out  
No bass jumping until I step foot in  
the vertical stabilizer, glide through any air condition  
Albatross is my demeanor, air stops when I'm in the scenery  
used to write to rhyme,

Note there is more method to my madness.  
More freshness filtered through my flyness.  
The Ghost-writer/ex-machina  
Y'all are speedknots while a mach sound barriers  
starscream silently seek heat and strike,  
no soul left on this plane  
Bars incendiary like catapulted molten rocks of flame  
Freeze or flight, the only fight plan that you will ever activate  
Check the score, it's a blowout, stealth bomber 112  
No offense, but you need an Air Raider.  
Or better yet a Viking! Moss!  
Blitz buster! More loose shrapnel than a blitzkrieg  
Pillage, plunder, and baggage claim.  
Your respite, the one whose lands are Bjorn from amongst  
the molders of katagat  
The one who always "Triumphs"  
"The Osirus of this ish!"  
It's not Wright for battles between brothers.  
Clouds Wilburn when Titans class,  
Or ville in eyes myself like Namor.  
There is no Romeoville at this atmospheric pressure  
Only Joliet reeks of burnt feathers an sewage waste  
Yet I pray that I won't be the last blackboy to fly  
from where the air is led, molded, and toxic  
Where dreams crash and burn while carrying less hope  
than a kamikaze pilot in Bermuda.  
I Am Not a Regular Person  
You are the debris from Nintendo's Rampage  
Yes...And even though I rock an Eagle-fitted cap  
shout out to Erin Dolan <3  
I got to give it up for a black man that proudly rocks a fez,  
or a fella that bricks a feather at a graduation



# Shout Outs

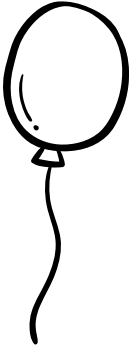


**Huge Congrats** to all who participated in North Park CWOW and writing center end-of-semester community building “StorySlam” event on December 15, and kudos to all who stood up to share their stories. Special recognition goes to judges Alicia Reese, Nestor Gomez, and DeCedrick Walker, and, of course...to the two storytellers who tied with the highest score on their 5-minute personal stories presented on the theme “Growing Pains”: David “Nazeeh” Bailey and Joseph “Jody” Montague.

**Applause all around** to those of you who have conferenced with a Writing Advisor on an academic writing assignment this past fall semester! Writing Advisors look forward to working with you again at Stateville CC this spring on Wednesday mornings during North Park study halls.

**Special Shout out** to Writing Advisor **Marshall Stewart** for handing in more drop-in slips (documenting writing conferences) than any other in the year 2023! Slips from this past semester note that Marshall (and others) have been supporting student writers from multiple educational programs as well as have provided information and assistance related to resume/CV writing, college, MA-program, and PhD-program related essays, and application processes.

**Writing Center Extra-Mile Awards** go to **Alann Vega** for his steady, punctual, and artistic contributions to *Feather Bricks* and his prosocial sense of reciprocity, service, and community support during North Park study hall sessions...AND...to **George Ross** for participating in regular study hall sessions and writing conferences with a variety of WAs to work on writing assignments from all 3 of the courses he was enrolled in last semester.



**Much appreciation for all writers who submitted work to this issue of *Feather Bricks*!** Those interested in submitting to our Feb/March edition, the deadline is **March 6**. We are especially interested in publishing revised work that was originally composed for an educational program or class assignment along with a brief reflection on your thinking/writing process.

**Happy New Year and nice work, Kewanee *Horizons* and *Two Roads* editors and contributors!** We see you and continue to be inspired by your dedication to the craft.

**Many thanks** 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.

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/>