

The background is a solid blue color. In the upper left, there is a black silhouette of a prison guard tower with a person standing on the balcony. To the right, there is a large, faint blue silhouette of a person's head and shoulders, with a pair of scales of justice integrated into the design. At the bottom, there is a black silhouette of a barbed wire fence.

CRIMINAL MINDS IN ACTION!

PRISON LIFE & BEYOND ARCHIVE

Edited by
L.J. Napoleon

LAW ENFORCEMENT | COURTS | CORRECTIONS | PRISON REFORM

CRIMINAL MINDS IN ACTION

PRISON LIFE & BEYOND ARCHIVE

This is an introduction to criminal justice in action you will not find in popular textbooks or traditional lesson plans. The insights shared by Prison Life & Beyond's think tank of "prison scholars" were derived through personal experiences; the authors are the perpetrators, the defendants, the prisoners, the parolees, the probationers, and the rehabilitated; they are the products of the theories and practices taught in criminal justice classrooms and administered through an ineffectual criminal justice system.

From death row prisoners, you learn about the psychological effects of solitary confinement, living in a 6 x 8 cell, 23 hours a day, for 20 years. You get hard-earned, brutal criminal justice insights from abused female murderers who candidly justify their crime, and serial killers explain the injustice of their sentences. A "jailhouse lawyer" tells why it is essential that "expert prisoners" have a voice in the development of criminal justice policies, legislation, and programming. Criminal Minds In Action is an ideal supplement for instructors and students seeking to deep dive into the motives of offenders.

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**CRIMINAL
MINDS IN ACTION
PRISON LIFE & BEYOND ARCHIVE**



We Believe In Redemption!

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Book Review – 73 of 141 essays

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Preface L.J. Napoleon

In theory, prisons are institutions for criminal rehabilitation. Becoming a productive member of society upon release is the hope for society and most inmates. One approach to behavior change is found in redemptive journalism, prison writing, expressing ideas.

Many inmates are incarcerated for their inability to control their behavior. Psychologists would make a case that these troubled individuals need an outlet to express misguided emotions. Some inmates have anger issues, some had troubled childhoods, and some have frustrations about their lives. Through writing, many inmates become less angry and more focused by putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) with the intent of addressing the nucleus of their rage. Authoring an article or writing a book can isolate deep issues and troubles for each inmate on an individual basis.

Our writers find instructive writing empowering and stimulating. A new mindset comes out of creative expression, the paradigm of being angry on autopilot disappears. Resolution and understanding are the results that surprise these men and women after such a simple approach to productive expression.

In fact, many inmates can work through the root of their emotions and issues and, in time, lose their natural negative behaviors. Through creative activities inmates can see how they were, and how they could be, and many will elect to become valuable members of society. In fact, previously incarcerated prisoners use their writing skills not only to better themselves in day-to-day living activities, but to manage themselves emotionally in times of stress. It should come as no surprise that reformed criminals use their newfound writing skills to make a living for themselves as article writers, bloggers, copywriters, and proofreaders.

Approaches learned from writing activities can be parlayed into other important areas of life. The understanding many inmates acquire can lead to self-discipline and overall self-confidence. Reformed criminals that are parents help their

children with schoolwork, while others continue their education for a lucrative career tied into their writing abilities.

Rehabilitation in prison via creative expression is not just a hope, it is an effective approach. Redemptive journalism produces positive results.

In this collection of commentary and opinion, prisoners and ex-prisoners share insight and their feelings on the criminal justice system – and life beyond the walls. We believe in redemption!

A Slice of Prison Life

Part 1.

Much of what the public learns about the choreography of law enforcement, arrest, court, and incarceration is inaccurate, a myth or lies. The operators of the nation's broken criminal justice system are not known for being transparent and open with how tax dollars are spent to maintain almost 2.3 million people in 1,833 state prisons, 110 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile facilities, 3,134 local jails, 218 immigration detention facilities, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories. The public is fed one side of an explanation for failed policies and practices. Here, in selected excerpts from Prison Life & Beyond Magazine Archives, we have provided prisoners throughout the U.S. prison system a vehicle to voice their perspectives on the criminal justice system.

I WILL CRUSH YOUR DREAMS!

**DeWayne Lee Harris #908867
Clallam Bay Corrections Center**

Allow me to introduce myself. I am your worst nightmare, your worst enemy. I can and will destroy your life. I will make you wish you had never been born. I specialize in administering pain.

Once I have you in my grip, I will slowly suck the life out of you, control your every thought and dream. I will take your family and friends from you. You will exist only as a prison member of the walking dead society, only a number, a statistic. I am life without a name.

I am punishment, cruel and unusual, equivalent to torture and barbarity. I am degrading punishment not known to common laws, so disproportionate as to shock the average offender. I have no fundamental respect for the humanity underlying the eighth amendment to the United States constitution.

I do not consider the character and the record of individual offenders, the circumstances of guilt or innocence, or the potential for rehabilitation and reintegration back into society; only punitive retribution satisfies me.

I am the most hated form of a death sentence, and yet I do not come uninvited. Your actions must choose me. I observe quietly, watching your slow and painful death. For example, in states where the death penalty is barred, I am mandatory for first-degree felony murder. I am an overzealous prosecutor, an ambitious judge's political opportunity, an angry victim's family, and I will inflict upon you the pain and suffering you have caused your victims and their loved ones. Until the day you die, I will inflict upon you unbearable pain.

In many cases, that will be 50 years or more. I am your worst enemy. I will not comfort your ass! I will make you hurt and cry out in pain, and you will become so numb that you can't feel anything at all. I will destroy all things good in your

life, just as you did to your victims and their families. I will give you long-term suffering. I am patient. I will be there with you as you slowly die. After you have served about twenty hopeless years of cruel punishment, you will learn to regret the insuperable pain you have inflicted upon your victims, their families, yourself, and your own families. I will make you beg God to take your life. Whenever I allow you to sleep, you will dream of committing suicide, and you will wake up every morning cursing God for not ending your miserable existence. I have tortured and killed millions, and I am pleased. Yes, you will welcome the day death finally takes hold of your soul, ending your wretched existence.

You should pray that you never meet me. But if you do, I'll be happy to embrace you as one of the walking dead. I am vengeance and revenge. I AM THE BIG PAYBACK!

REMEMBERING BRANDON BERNARD

05/03/80—12/10/20

Federal Correctional Center, Terre Haute, Indiana

(Brandon Bernard was a writer for Prison Life & Beyond Magazine for four years. He died on death row by lethal injection on December 10, 2020, despite pleas from people worldwide calling on the president to stop the execution. RIP.)

Life on death row is no Tupac and Suge Knight rap video. Can you imagine the gravity of knowing the exact date on which you are going to die? Can you imagine people sitting you down and filling out forms, planning your last day on earth to the last detail? What will you eat, who can see you, when it will happen, and where will you send your only possessions?

Here, you learn to savor and appreciate everything and person. Your days move slowly, grinding on the cosmic time path. Your only contact with the outside is digital or delayed responses: letters, monitored emails, phone calls, and TV. Nothing is real because nothing is ever face-to-face. Then you watch the American sheep on the news and television, caring about the best commercial that advertisers use to tell you the things you should desire. They stand in the line for days, not to help their fellow man or change someone's life, but to get a new phone made by four other companies and will be obsolete in a year. Then they'll do this dance all over again.

Wake up, America. They are killing your citizens! Yes, we are US citizens. They are strapping us on white cushioned, white crosses! (Hallelujah!) and telling you it is in the name of justice and that they are doing it for your protection. Trust us, they say; the evidence overwhelmingly supports their guilt. We wouldn't have spent all this money if this wasn't the guy.

But do they talk about the innocent people DNA results force them to let go, sometimes within days of being executed? Do they tell you that they claimed that they had

overwhelming evidence against them to the last moment? Do you not think they have killed innocent people? The prosecutors and judges do not get punished for their lies, even facilitating deception and corruption.

They don't tell you how they used the case to get promoted, run for a higher public office, or increase their salaries. But if they did tell you, would you even care? They put exonerated people on the evening news for forty-five seconds; they talk about their 20-year ordeal on death row, and how the system stole their lives, then they are offered an apology. How can someone tell you how fucked up the system is in a short sound bite? How can someone tell you about the nights they cried in their bed or the times they felt abandoned by all those they knew? How can someone tell you about the shame of being a villain when you did nothing wrong? Then the reporter interrupts off because it is time to cut to scenes from the next Kardashians promo.

I look at the world and say – where are the heroes? Where are the people fighting for those that can't fight for themselves? It is like we can't see a house unless engulfed in flames. A person can't even have compassion or do the right thing without worrying about being attacked and vilified on social media for being a murderer lover or soft on crime.

And when a person is released, the people who believe in the death penalty wave flags and banners, proclaiming how well the system works. "Justice was served," they say with smiles. "We got it right!"

From my prison cell, that's bullshit! Almost all exonerated prisoners from death row were found innocent despite the system – the prosecutors and judges, not because of them. The prosecutors and judges didn't want these people to be released. The States fight against DNA testing, refuse to pay for it, and, even when confronted with DNA proof, some prosecutors still reject DNA evidence. They were willing to let innocent people die to protect careers and professional status.

The American Justice System boils down to this, money, hard work, and more money.

If you want to write, please feel free. I appreciate you giving my words your precious time. They have no power without an ear to hear and a soul to inspire.

ABOLISHING THE DEATH PENALTY IS A HALF MEASURE THAT OBSCURES LEGAL INJUSTICE

**Lyle C. May #0580028
Central Prison in Raleigh, N.C.**

John Grisham, noted author and criminal defense attorney, recently published an op-ed article that claimed most North Carolina death row prisoners did not receive a fair trial. As a board member of the New York Innocence Project and someone versed in criminal law, Grisham recognizes that the capital trial process is flawed and rightly says: "It's time for North Carolina to stop fighting for executions that represent not its future, but battles of an unjust past."

Too often, the justice system fails the very people "due process" should protect, leaving defendants to bear unjust results. Grisham's article was understandably limited in scope. It could not cover every aspect of the death penalty, but there are some integral points about the capital appeals process that needs a closer look.

As someone convicted for a double homicide and sentenced to death in 1999, I have lived through 33 executions. As a result, I have a firm grasp of the priorities death row prisoners believe should be addressed. It is critical to remember that if a defendant did not receive a fair trial, one should question the sentence and the conviction.

I applaud anyone who fights to abolish capital punishment, and Grisham states that North Carolina has an uncharacteristically outsized death row, comprised of people whose trials were "grossly unfair." Most of the 140 people on North Carolina's death row - approximately 75% - were tried in an era before the Indigent Defense Service supplied defendants with capitally trained attorneys, before DNA exonerations and the US Supreme Court rulings banning death sentences for juveniles and the intellectually disabled. Also absent were protections against coerced confessions,

wrongful convictions, and rogue prosecutors who withhold exculpatory evidence from the defense. The most impactful reform of the early 2000s ended the mandatory requirement prosecutors seek death in every first-degree murder case.

North Carolina was the only state that maintained such a law.

The “progressive” reforms Grisham mentioned only brought North Carolina in line with other death penalty states. Despite this, prosecutors contrive to use the death penalty to get defendants to plead guilty and accept life without parole. Prosecutors continue to deny race is a factor in jury selection. Rogue DAs who are guilty of putting innocent people on death row remain untouchable. Though helpful in reducing the overall number of death sentences in North Carolina, the legislative reforms of the early 2000s do nothing for those of us who were tried before their enactment.

In the raging political theatre of the '90s, capital punishment was the sweeping sword of “justice” alongside a surge in de facto life, life with parole, and life without parole sentences, mandatory minimum, and other mass incarceration policies. Unfortunately, none of these laws had a significant deterrent effect, have overcrowded prisons, overburdened state budgets, and decimated communities in urban centers.

Because tough-on-crime rhetoric has been allowed to sink public policy and grow a draconian criminal justice system, North Carolina’s death row population exploded with people who never belonged there. Since 1977 the state has had a 71% reversal rate of death sentences on appeal. This means three out of every four death sentences and convictions are substantively defective. What should be the most alarming is that eight people were found innocent, pardoned, and 43 executed. One innocent person for every five executions. How has this been allowed to happen?

In an adversarial legal system, winning is the goal and, while the burden of proof is on the state, they have all the resources. Considering that most capital defendants are indigent, a conviction is mostly a foregone conclusion before the trial begins. Consider also that prosecutors withhold evidence

favorable to the defense, charge with little oversight, rely on jailhouse snitch testimony, use coerced confessions and flawed police interrogations, and imbalanced juries to gain a conviction regardless of the facts. When a jury is seated, even if a defendant has competent counsel, an acquittal is unlikely.

The cases of Henry McCollum and Leon Brown are prime examples of this process. Henry spent 30 years on death row before the NC Innocence Inquiry Commission, in connection with their investigation of his brother Leon, found both men innocent of the 1984 rape and murder of Sabrina Bure. The Commission helped Henry because Leon had been previously acquitted of Sabrina's murder and resentenced to life for her rape. While Henry remained on death row, a friend of Leon's filed a claim with the Commission, which refuses to investigate active death penalty cases.

As a member of the NY Innocence Project, Grisham is aware that, adequate trial or not, death row inmates cannot file innocence claims unless they: 1) have clear and convincing proof of actual innocence. 2) are out of appeals, 3) lack legal representation. Death row prisoners who lack legal representation and have no appeals are executed. Innocence, the US Supreme Court has ruled, is not an appealable issue. Also, there are many cases where the defendant was overcharged by prosecutors while guilty of a crime. No innocence project will consider such a case, and a sentence of life without parole would end a capital defendant's access to legal representation.

Appellate attorneys cannot fully pursue a client's claims because they lack the investigatory power of the NC Innocence Inquiry Commission. An attorney, for example, cannot search a police evidence room or look for exculpatory evidence and lost files in a dusty courthouse attic. So instead, appellate attorneys push their clients to plead guilty and accept life without parole, despite repeated claims of innocence – much like they did with Henry.

Though Grisham highlights five examples of the status quo in defective capital cases from the '90s, calling for an end to

capital punishment does not go far enough and fails to address the underlying problems. Grisham is correct that “by today’s” standards and certainly under today’s laws, the bulk of North Carolina’s death row inmates did not receive fair trials. But converting their sentences to life in prison without parole, without a new trial or thorough investigation, is as grave an injustice as lethal injection. The difference is that this time, well-meaning abolitionists will have brought about a new age of silent executions, where death by incarceration is acceptable, and no one is willing to examine or hold people accountable for the legal system.

NOTHING TO LOSE

**Edward Malave-Otero #379083
Wisconsin Correctional Institution**

A short time ago there was this Latino guy about five cells away from me who I overheard in a heated argument with an older black man in the next cell over. It was about 8:00 p.m. and the argument, which started over the fact that the black guy was playing chess over the tier with another guy and got pissed-off when he could no longer hear his chess opponent calling out his moves over the loud Spanish speaking of the Latino guy; the argument became violent as death threats and other disrespectful comments quickly turned into racist comments being made by the older black guy.

The Latino knew that it wouldn't pay to shoot back racial slurs, so instead, he kept calling the black guy a "Bitch" and saying, "We'll see who's "SOFT" (not tough) in the morning!" The older black man continued talking shit for a while. Not long after the argument died down, I was let out of my cell for an unrelated reason and as I was passing by the Latino guy, whom I happen to know, shows me an altered pair of scissors (one of the two sharp sides was missing) and he tells me in Spanish, "I'm going to cut this mother@#%*&!"

I said, "Man, I can't tell you what to do but all I will say is, think about it twice before you do it."

He looked directly into my eyes and said, "It's not like I have anything to lose.

I'm already "Turned Off!"

Turned-off (or Apagado, in Spanish) means having life without parole, natural life, or more time than one could possibly outlive.... He's been officially "deactivated," having killed someone (or more). Anyhow, the next morning when the cell doors were opened to let everyone out for breakfast, the Latino guy went straight for the older black guy. Since I did not go out for breakfast that morning, as I lay in my top bunk, I could see it happening right in front of my cell. The

older black guy, even while bleeding profusely, was pretty much on top of the Latino, trying hard to drill him into the ground. I could see the Latino guy adjusting his shank and swinging it upward into the black man over and over, stabbing him anywhere he could, blows to the neck, chest, and abdominal area.

When the guards finally came to separate them, there was a sizable pool of blood on the floor, and the black man was continuing to fight. Even with five guards on him and all the bleeding, they could not get him down on the floor to restrain him. He had a lot of fight in him. When the guards realized how much he was bleeding, they backed off for a moment before giving it another go and still couldn't get him to stop fighting them. The Latino guy did his best to conceal the weapon, but I saw where he threw it, and so did all the snitches. Also, I could see that the scissors (or half of the scissors) he used were curved as if while he was stabbing the other guy, it bent hitting a bone. Now that had to hurt! I later found out that the Latino was facing 60 additional years in prison (as if it would make any difference to him); the other guy was in critical condition with multiple stab wounds at a hospital near the prison. Ouch!

LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE

**Tamara Hinkle #W60789
California Institution for Women**

I'll never forget the day I was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, plus ten years for a murder robbery that I never wanted to commit. Ten years, to be served before the life without parole, like are you serious, and at 19 years old, I became Tamara Hinkle # W60789.

The fact that I was mother to a six-month-old child, a business college graduate, and sexual abuse survivor meant nothing. Instead, I was stripped of anything close to normal and introduced to "the big house" or "tha pen," as most people say.

Because the "correctional" / prison system discourages individuality, most people make it a point to be different and stand out...maybe they're afraid of being forgotten...All I know is this place has taught me things I'd have never learned in society. I've learned how to survive, pimp the system and play the game. In the process, I've been suicidal, assaultive, medication-dependent, victimized, and victimizer. I fought to protect myself from being exploited. I became a "gay for the stay" wife to addicts who manipulated me into fighting their battles. Not knowing how to love me, I lost my identity and became a codependent, needy, clingy girl who thought sex meant to love.

Prison wasn't always doing hard time. I drank hooch, smoked weed, and sold drugs, dressed with the best of them. I'm talking heels and tight skirts, button-downs, sandals, and boots. I adore Burberry and Elizabeth Arden perfume - in prison!! I did so much to fit in, only to stand out.

Angry at God, I turned my back on him because he'd let me down. When, in fact, I'd let my mother, daughter, family, and self down. I was supposed to be the one to make it, become a lawyer, have tons of money, and save us from the harsh

realities of life. But, instead, at 14 years old, I became the mistress of kingpins, growing up too fast, wanting to be loved.

I etched out my existence in a cell that consisted of eight metal bunks with lockers to match, two sinks, a shower, and a toilet stall. The California central women facility in Chowchilla is a place violence reigns supreme. Every time I choose to smile and live my best life, there always seemed to be a dark force forming to steal my joy.

For the better part of 16 years, my attitude was, “I’m doing life without.” I don’t give a fu#! However, several batteries lock-up (SHU) terms and court cases later, I’ve found light at the end of the tunnel. Don’t get me wrong; these things still occur; however, now that there’s hope for a life outside of prison, my outlook has changed. I also have two children conceived while incarcerated who bring me joy.

These fake-believe friends and pen pals? They’re still ready to sell a dream to the unsuspecting. You see, my eyes are open to the lies and deceit of “tha pen.” The “system” was designed to fail everyone. The food is toxic, and the commissary is a choice between salt (high blood pressure) or sugar (diabetes) overpriced, understocked and defective. The water does more harm than good to your body, hair, and skin. Seventy thousand dollars per inmate doesn’t mean the state gives you the best of anything, indigent kits with a generic deodorant that burns your armpits, fake flossers sure to break within 30 seconds, and metallic-tasting toothpaste consists of your “hygienic kit.”

Is it a wonder that most females do what they know best? They seduce staff to get by. Trust and believe that staff exploits them, a favor for a favor, fair exchange, no robbery.

“Rehabilitation” is a joke! The groups that teach us how to cope and manage anger are there to “look good.” Prison is the battlefield. If you can make it in here, the “free world” is a piece of cake.

I no longer spend my time reminiscing on the past, depressed about the present, or hopeless about the future. I am still serving life without parole with a family that loves me and kids who need me. I accept the fact that my actions took a life.

I get up every morning grateful for another day. I see people serving life without parole get released, and I see short-termers pick up cases. I watch the sunset, hummingbirds get nectar out of flowers and planes in the sky, as the words to a Bob Marley song reminds me to: “Emancipate yourself from mental slavery; no one but ourselves can free our mind.”

[LEAVE BOOK REVIEW | My Site 2 \(wixsite.com\)](#)

No One Told Me I Could Attend Harvard, Princeton or Yale

**Arnold Barnes III #1633044
State Of Texas Telford Unit**

Because of the portrayal of violence in prisons by television shows, a prison sentence may seem like a total disaster. But like life, prison can be what you make of it. Concrete and steel don't make a prison any more than rainbows and waterfalls create a paradise. It's all a matter of perspective. Time is priceless, which can make time in prison an asset, allowing one to acquire skills needed to succeed in many areas of life. Most people must get up for work, get the kids ready for school, drop the kids off at school, work 8-hours, pick up the dry cleaning, pick the kids back up, cook dinner, wash dishes, and walk the dog. I don't have to do any of those things! All I must do is do me, so I study scripture, walk a mile, attend a 2-hour law library session, and do 100 pull-ups by 8 a.m.

Reading, many neurological researchers believe, is uniquely beneficial as it is intellectually enriching while powerfully stimulating both hemispheres of the brain. Yet only about 20 percent of the population reads from a book on most days. The good news is, one thing you will do in prison is read. You'll have plenty of opportunities to fulfill your brain's needs with other productive exercises like writing, drawing, playing word games, board games, conversing, and engaging in stimulating hobbies. Prison won't only add to your brain's health and longevity, but it also can be physically rewarding. Want to lose a few pounds or maybe a few inches off your waist? You can get this done because you're going to get plenty of exercises once you get tired of reading and studying all day. When it comes to the food, unless you plan on buying a bunch of junk food from the commissary, you're going to eat your vegetables because if not, you won't eat much at all. Are you a smoker? Like to drink alcohol? Not in here; you're walking out of here clean and sober. Yet, the most valuable

aspect of prison is its opportunity for self-education. Here you can get the same education that people spend thousands of dollars on at universities for little or nothing when you consider that all the college professors write books on the subjects and courses they teach. All you must do is go to the prison library. If that isn't enough, you can take one of the many reasonably priced correspondence courses for inmates provided by numerous colleges around the country. Yes, you can walk out of prison with an associate degree or even a bachelor's in practically anything. They don't show that in the movies!

The potential for self-education behind the walls is almost unlimited. Like to learn a new language? It may be as easy as asking your celly to teach you. Trust me, *je sais*. Entrepreneurial? You can use your time to learn everything from grant writing, how to start a non-profit organization, and business management. See yourself with a future in sales? You can practice your influence and marketing techniques on the inmate population by making cakes and then "spreading activation," "leveraging metaphors," and "associating your products with naturally occurring primes" like Halloween. Are you the cerebral type, intrigued by the mysteries of the mind? Clinical psychology, psychiatry, philosophical debate. Perfect, when you get your first mental health evaluation, you can ask the unit psych doctor how he can be an expert of the mind when he can't tell you where his is located? Maybe you're into the hard sciences like physics. Though confined within space-time, once you sense how fast your sentence flies by, you'll understand firsthand how time is "relative." Not into any of those things? No problem. You can sit back and watch the flow of prison life and still learn lessons in political science, behavioral studies like operant conditioning, negative reinforcement, and because each prison has its system of bartering, economics 101. Don't want to do that either? Instead, complain and feel sorry for yourself, wailing in your self-inflicted sorrows. You'll receive a lesson in astrophysics for all your pessimism, discovering how prison, besides being

an institution of learning, can also be a black hole that is a dark region in space with great mass and a gravitational pull so strong that not even light can escape it. Perspective matters!

I promise you; incarceration can give you a newfound appreciation for life, liberty, and learning, which will add to your quality of life and most assuredly become an invaluable asset. But, unfortunately, in my case, no one told me I could attend Harvard, Princeton, or Yale. But I have other options.

MY DAD'S FOOTSTEPS

**George Rocky LaRue #422552
Waupun Correctional Institution**

When I was about six years old, my mother had this boyfriend who was always in and out of prison; he was like a stepdad. She used to drag me with her to various prisons he was in so we could visit him. One of the prisons had an outside play area, and there was a sandbox with a giant cement turtle in the middle that kids could crawl under. At that time, prisoners and visitors could eat and smoke, and ballpoint pens were not forbidden as a lethal weapon. So on one visit, I got a hold of a pen and crawled under this giant cement turtle and wrote "Rocky," my middle name. I etched it in rather well.

As an inmate of the same prison, twenty-one years later, part of my six-year-old graffiti was still there! On my way to an institutional job, I walked by the playground and suddenly remembered the turtle and playing under it as a kid. I wondered if it was the same turtle since this was a different location within the institution. How many molds of this big cement turtle were made? I asked old school prison staff, and they said it was about 30-years old, the only one in there; they had never seen another one. I still couldn't believe it and was skeptical until, a few weeks later, I got on my hands and knees and looked under it. Sure shit, there it was, faded, but some parts of my six-year-old, self-tattooed hand strokes were visible, and my name, written 21-years earlier.

Was it predestined for me to see this cement turtle 21-years later as an adult inmate at the same prison my stepdad served time in? I had that prison job for a while, and every day I walked by it, I had an eerie feeling. So, this turtle played a significant role at two different times in my life. It was and still is very thought-provoking for me to compare these two times. It's funny and weird. But, crime is always there if you choose to go back to it, just waiting like the turtle in the prison playground.

DUMP TOXIC PEOPLE

Eric Van Reid (R.I.P.)

Several years ago, while in Attica, I knew a man who got ambushed and murdered by three convicts just a few months before his release date. He spent 15 years straight behind bars, and, in that time, he achieved a college education among his many other noteworthy accomplishments. He would have been voted most likely to succeed if an honest poll were taken by his peers, especially considering his outstanding physical abilities and intense persona projection. Tragic as it was, he died standing up to protect someone he thought a friend, a friend who ran off and left him to die at the bottom of C Block's stairwell. This occurrence is not a unique prison story. Countless times I've witnessed decent convicts get the wrong end of the stick for a corrupt companion who instigated a conflict and then fled when the drama got thick. Companions like these are "Toxic People." They appear harmless on the surface, but they are the lords of chaos, strife, and violence behind the scenes. No sane individual would commit themselves to a proven poisonous relationship. Toxic people have a good presentation and know how to "mimic" wholesome characteristics. Repeatedly, I've observed men lose everything positive going for themselves because of their association with toxic peers, the kind of peers who couldn't care less about jeopardizing another person's welfare. Poisonous people are parasitical vampires sucking the lifeblood of each relationship they engage in until the relationship is bone dry.

Toxic people operate similarly to the H.I.V. virus. There are five phases to their operation: Attachment, Penetration, Integration, Replication, and Evacuation. Like the H.I.V. virus in its process of infecting the host, toxic people Attach themselves to a person, pretending to befriend them. After the attachment phase, they Penetrate the relationship beyond superficial boundaries and comfortably win the complete

confidence of their targeted victim. Their progressive objective is to learn detailed information about the other person's weaknesses and vices to exploit them. The next phase is Integration: they engage their victims in emotional and mental games and falsely mirror a façade of intimate bonding to take the relationship to another level of commitment.

A relationship with toxic people may begin with a 50-50 share and similar share agreement, but gradually the giving soon becomes one-sided. Toxic people are takers. When they do give, it is never anything of genuine substance requiring a significant sacrifice on their behalf. In most relationships, even healthy ones, the underlying agenda is to bend those relationships over to our will. Toxic people pervert this relational activity by seeking to Replicate (clone) others after their image completely. Once a toxic person has taken what they can out of a relationship, their next step is to Evacuate, get out of the relationship they've contaminated. They rarely leave a relationship on good terms. They are prone to burn their bridges with others by turning friends into heartbroken foes completely. Associations of every kind have their breaking with a point. Toxic people work hard at pushing others over the edge of their tolerance. Because most toxic people are emotionally and morally defective, it's a small matter for them to abandon the friendships they've initiated with ill intent. But they are certainly not to abort their associations until they've committed such violations against it to seal its demise. Be assured that toxic companions will cause you to lose family ties and other wholesome relationships. In subtle ways, they'll demand your full attention and time-consuming devotion to their selfish hidden agendas. Stick with a toxic person long enough, and you'll lose your parole date; your approved transfer will be a dead issue, and you'll continue your loss while incarcerated until your very life is at stake (either by catching new prison terms or by your literal physical death).

Toxic people are keen to insulate themselves with naïve but loyal peers, the kind that would stand firmly by one's side

against impossible odds. Toxic people take advantage of the goodwill of their peers by setting them up to be the fall guy when danger approaches. Toxic people are clever speakers and masterful manipulators of the "I dare you" ploy. They are in the business of ruining lives without a shred of conscience.

There will never be a shortage of toxic people; they are everywhere and in every type of relationship. They position themselves well in every environment. But, unfortunately, most of us won't begin to recognize the poison their toxic association has injected into our lives until it is too late to counter its impact. But for fair warning, here are a few identifying traits of a toxic person who may be involved in your life:

- 1.) Present your goals and aspirations to a toxic person, and they will minimize your dreams by offering the potential nightmarish side of them.
- 2.) When the toxic people you know are aware of something positive about to occur in your life, they are quick to motivate you in self-sabotaging and self-defeating behaviors.
- 3.) When you begin moving toward progressive change and constructive pursuits, they'll attack you with guilt trips and accuse you of betraying your friendship because you've decided to handle your priorities responsibly.
- 4.) Seldom will a toxic person praise others for their dominant good characteristics and qualities. They won't, however, miss an opportunity to point out another's faults or drag them through the mud for the slightest flaws.
- 5.) Toxic people are arrogant. They despise those who are genuinely humble, caring, and compassionate. You can never give enough to a toxic person, and they will never tire of taking what little you have, even if it is your very last!!!!
- 6.) Toxic people are known, projectionists. Their gift is in reflecting onto others the shortcomings that they possess. Their overall personality is plagued by defense mechanisms geared toward avoiding personal introspection and moral inventory, yet never failing to put others down.

7.) Toxic people are incapable of producing enduring positive results in their relationships with others. If they occasionally assist you forward ten miles, they'll drag you a hundred miles backward before long. Toxic people are traitors and swift to sabotage another's freedom, happiness, and general welfare to get their necks off the hook.

Toxic people are like crabs in a barrel; if left to them, no one would be allowed to escape their dead-end circumstances; everyone goes down, everyone dies....!!!

CRIME, POVERTY, RACE IN AMERICA

**Kamau Damali #279380
Columbia Corrections Institution**

The current crime wave hitting Amerika, Chicago, Baltimore, and Milwaukee, is alarming but predictable. It is disturbing that the majority who are killing and getting killed are young black males ranging from twelve to eighteen. Predictable that when one adds poverty, crime, and race into the equation, it is not surprising that the perpetrators and victims of this crime wave are low income. One cannot discuss crime without discussing poverty, and one cannot discuss poverty without discussing race. These components are interrelated and connected. One cannot discuss poverty without discussing race. One cannot discuss one without the other; therefore, let's discuss them.

1. Poverty

Poverty, especially in the urban and rural neo-colonies (ghettos, barrios, and the Appalachian Mountains) of America, is systematic and cropped up by the U. S. elite and ruling class to further the depression and oppression of poor people. For example, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and the U. S. ruling class build private and non-private prisons to warehouse the have-nots. The prison industrial complex is an industry that survives on long prison sentences. Prison officials make lucrative deals with governors throughout the country to transfer incarcerated men and women to work in privately run prisons in Texas, Tennessee, Minnesota, and Oklahoma. If this practice isn't another form of chattel slavery, then I don't know what is.

2. Crime

Mostly, urban crime is a result or reaction to poverty. Crime (in Amerika) has an unrighteous and unconscious antidote for centuries concerning the have-nots. Afrikaans in Amerika went from plantation to the ghetto. We stole to provide for our families because we had nothing. That is the basis of crime in

Amerika. Suppose one doubts that amending society and reducing the number of kaptives (prisoners) in the united states (normally considered a promising social goal) is a threat to the prison industrial business complex. In that case, all one needs to do is read the GEO group's (formally Wackenhut) 2011 annual report: "In particular, the demand for our correctional and detention facilities and services could be adversely affected by changes in existing criminal or immigration laws, crime rates in jurisdictions in which we operate, the relaxation of criminal or immigration enforcement efforts, leniency in conviction, sentencing or deportation practices, and the decriminalization of certain activities that are currently proscribed by criminal laws. For example, any changes to the decriminalization of drugs and controlled substances could affect the number of persons arrested, convicted, sentenced, and incarcerated, thereby potentially reducing the demand for prisons to house them. Similarly, reductions in crime rates could reduce arrests, convictions, and sentencing requiring incarceration at prisons.

Immigration reform laws which are currently a focus for legislators and politicians at the federal, state, and local level also could materially adversely impact us."

The prison industrial complex is an industry that needs long prison sentences, rounded up undocumented immigrants, and increasing crime to thrive. To keep the plantation beds occupied, these kapitalists groups and others have doled out millions of dollars to money-hungry lobbyists, federal and state legislators and governors to allow the immigration problem to go unresolved, to make certain that marijuana is not legalized, and to make sure that out of this world prison sentences, like California's three strikes and you are imprisoned for life policies, keep a regular flow of money and profits streaming to their shareholders. They are also optimistic that the national drop in crime is just a provisional run.

3. Race

There is only one race, the human race, to which Islam

teaches. In America, everything is based on race. Poverty and race are inextricably tied together; if one is black or brown, the chance of growing up in poverty in the United States is second to none. This is not accidental nor coincidental; it's premeditated. The so-called white rulers of the dominant culture designed it to be this way. Take the young racist, Dylan Roof, who walked into a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, prayed for an hour with the parishioners and then pulled out a 45 semi-automatic handgun and slaughtered nine people. A five-year-old boy played dead. Roof kept one parishioner, a woman, alive to tell authorities that he was there to kill people. He wrote a manifesto about white supremacy, venting how black men want to rape white women and how he wanted to start a race war. Though I am disgusted by what happened in South Carolina, I am also disgusted by the murders black men commit against other black men. We shouldn't just be outraged when white people kill us; we should be equally outraged when we (black people) kill us. It's more sick and depraved racist bastards like Dylan Roof and, for anyone to think because we have a black president, Barack Obama, racism is yesterday's news is sadly mistaken. This is a sexist, racists, pro-right-wing Christian nation; make no mistake about that.

People wonder why I believe the system does not want brothers like me waking up brothers who suffer from psychological decay. We are the fascist's systems meal tickets, and it (the fascist system) wants us to remain anti-social or criminal-minded. When we (conscious black men) teach brothers about their history and the importance of becoming better men, it threatens the fascist system's economic station.

FACIAL RECOGNITION: A FAULTY TOOL FOR POLICE

**Jeremy Busby #881193
State of Texas Mark Stiles Unit**

Imagine a dozen law enforcement agents storm into your home and arrest you for robbery. Publicly humiliated and confused, you are hauled to a police station only to discover that you have been misidentified by the department's faulty facial recognition system. Welcome to the new world created by Artificial Intelligence (A.I.). Society's increasing reliance on A.I. has penetrated the day-to-day operations of law enforcement at an alarming rate, most notably with the utilization of faulty facial recognition technology. As a result, critics of facial recognition technology, including congressional leaders, tech experts, and civil rights organizations, are working to regulate its usage in law enforcement.

According to a recent study, *Discriminating System: Gender Race, And Power In A.I.*, that was released by New York University's A.I. Now Institute, technologies like facial recognition are rife with bias and discrimination. For example, the facial recognition systems used by law enforcement tend to create false positives and misidentifications, especially among people of color and women. In NYU'S report, researchers highlight one of the primary reasons that contribute significantly to facial recognition flaws: the tech workers who design them are invariably white and male.

"The problem of a lack of diversity in tech is not new, but it has reached a new and urgent inflection point," says Meredith Whittaker, cofounder of NYU'S A.I. Now Institute and co-author of its report. "In short, the problem here is that those in the room when A.I. is created represent an extremely narrow segment of the population." Mostly developed by major tech companies like Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and Amazon, critics say that these tech giants have failed to prevent the

hyper-intelligent facial recognition systems from learning and reinforcing racial and gender discrimination patterns held by its inventors. The only way to remove such bias, according to the NYU report, is to “diversify the homogenous group of engineers building the automated system.”

Increasing diversity within the rank of giants has been a daunting task. Nearly 80-percent of A.I. professors are men. As of 2015, women only make up 18 percent of computer science majors in the U.S. Among people of color, the numbers are more staggering when Stanford University unveiled its new Artificial Intelligence Institute this spring; there was not a single black person listed within the 120 faculty and technology leaders designated to represent the new facility.

One of law enforcement’s biggest suppliers of facial recognition software is Amazon. Ironically, it’s Amazon’s facial recognition software that has come under the most criticism. Numerous A.I. researchers and civil rights organizations have placed pressure on law enforcement to halt the usage of Amazon’s facial recognition technology, pointing to the discriminatory damage it can cause. “It does not matter how good the machine is if it is still being fed the wrong figures; the wrong answers are still likely to come out,” according to a report issued by the center on Privacy & Technology at George Town Law regarding facial recognition systems. In addition, a recent MIT study found Amazon’s recognition system performs poorer than facial recognition software made by Microsoft and IBM.

THE FACE-OFF:

Major cities have already begun passing laws to curtail the usage of facial recognition systems in law enforcement. Government officials in San Francisco recently became the first principal municipality in the country to ban this technology by local law enforcement. Members of the U.S. Congress have also weighed in. A bipartisan bill introduced by Senators Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) and Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) would require tech companies to test the “algorithm

accountability” of all facial recognition systems before bringing them to the open market. “Even if the technology were perfectly accurate, it still poses a threat to public safety and civil rights,” insists Matt Cagle, a technology and civil liberties attorney with the ACLU.

As these heated exchanges begin the processes of adding regulation to law enforcement agencies’ utilization of A.I., it’s clear that facial recognition, at this point, is a faulty tool for police. It’s probably safe to say that facial recognition systems are borderline junk science that could result in innocent minorities wrongfully accused, adding to an already broken, unjust criminal justice system.

PRISON REFORM?

Varner/Varner Supermax Unit Grady, AR

Prison reform - together, those two words sound powerful, and the politically correct terminology for after a person's incarcerated. What society, the taxpayers, and the families of the imprisoned don't know is that prisons are failing to execute reform. In some states, it's due to funding and down-right neglect and incompetence. At the rate prisons are filling up, the powers-that-be are focusing their mentality on building new and more significant facilities throughout the nation.

But, in Illinois, Tamms' supermax was officially closed January 2013 due to prisoners housed in solitary confinement for more than a decade. There were reports of brutal treatment of prisoners with mental illness and driving prisoners to madness and even suicide. Where is the reform in that?

Here in Arkansas, prisoners with bulky sentences are not eligible for any reform programs vital to their re-entry into society. Instead, they are warehoused and forced into labor jobs and duties. Failure to take part or adequately do the work is a one-way ticket to the hole. With little to do on a positive or rehabilitative level, those prisoners have more free time to focus on becoming better criminals and smuggling in contraband. Daily, these prisoners abused by the punishment and misplaced aggressions of staff and other inmates. The guards enforce the rules and policies against the inmates with an iron boot mentality. The same rules and procedures apply to staff and admin, but they consistently break, bend, and ignore those rules, all in the name of doing their job and without fear of repercussion.

The classrooms here are packed with inmates without a high school diploma, some of whom have attended the same G.E.D. Classes, on the same level, for well over 20 years, and have yet to receive their general education diploma.

In my opinion, the prison educators see the inmates as a paycheck and have little or no wish to aid the illiterate or under-educated, ranging from ages 17 to 70. Several years ago, the parole board refused to release inmates until they obtained their G.E.D., but they lifted this stipulation due to the backlog of inmates with parole granted papers holding bed space for new commitments. Because of my own will and wish to obtain my G.E.D., I acquired it within my first 60 days in prison, with no thanks to the teachers or prison staff. I had to misappropriate a couple of work-study books to study and refresh my skills to prepare for the G.E.D. Test. Afterward I took the Laubauch test and became a certified tutor. As a result, I've helped more inmates obtain their G.E.D. than the officials hired to do so.

Instead of reform, prisoners are thrown into barracks and cell blocks to "Go For What You Know," as it's called. The administration pretends to orientate new arrivals, but all they do is give them paperwork to sign stating that you know the rules and what happens if you violate them. It's a broken system. Correctional officers know how to write disciplinary reports, but very few could perform C.P.R. if the situation occurred. The administration fails to pre-warn new arrivals on the dangers of prison life. Information about offered programs or what people to contact about issues they may have is not routinely provided.

Arkansas Department of Corrections has boldly displayed their thoughts on prison reform by placing job security ads on the side of their trucks. A portrait of an inmate behind bars, an unemployed person shaking hands with a prison guard, is showcased with the words "Want A Job Come Work For Us." This portrait clearly states that crime is a market, and that market is profitable with incarceration.

Among prison administrators, "prison reform" is a profane word, and the public is led to believe that reform is the goal of incarceration. Mass incarceration is a lucrative industry that investors throw money into. Just follow the criminal justice dollars, and the failure of the system becomes evident.

STARTING A NEW YEAR

**Aminah Dorsey #X34913
Central California Women's Facility**

From my bunk, I watched my neighbors roam almost lifelessly up and down the hall. I envisioned the wheels of cunning, deception, and manipulation vividly turning in their minds as they individually plotted and schemed on how they could score heroin, methamphetamine, or any other drug that would help escape reality.

For those that enjoy horror movies as much as I do, we know that zombies feast on the brains of the living. They wander, transfixed, and intent on procuring their next source of fulfillment. Unfortunately, this prison has made the fictitious zombies of the big screen reality. Drugs are what I consider the equivalent of “brains” today. Thus, the prison system serves as an incubator for the NFO-Zombies: The manifestation of a new generation of women experiencing dearth of soul.

In the process of their alleged “Rehabilitation” efforts, many of the women here have succumbed to a soul death, a hopelessness unlike anything I’ve ever seen. This affliction mostly strikes those prisoners with life without the possibility of parole, those with extremely long sentences. Prisoners eligible for parole, sentenced to 6 years to life are the women that take advantage of the self-help circuit; to avoid them speeds up that sure suffering of a slow death in this lost land. The structure of our penal system makes it easy for too many prisoners to concede defeat on psyche medications and illegal drugs, daytime television, and meaningless institutional programming.

Instead of rehabilitating, prisoners are stuffed inside taxpayer-endorsed sub-communities where government employees, guards, educational staff, and those contracted traffic in drugs, cell phones, and other contraband. This corruption further advances the crippling of women’s minds,

numbing them to the realities and responsibilities of mothers, daughters, grandmothers, sisters, and aunts. The prison industrial complex is manufacturing future citizens who have a habit of comfortable irresponsibility and, for many, a thirst for chemical substances they never had before incarceration.

To further degrade the state of women prisoners, the prison began allowing tablets that offer juvenile games and a variety of music yet, somehow, strategically, devoid of instructional materials that would aid women in their re-entry into society. It seems another move designed to perpetuate the recycling of women through the criminal justice system. Prisoners are not being educated about the importance of politics and economics because to be informed would dismantle the prison industrial complex. It pays to keep women prisoners as an unlearned group, incapable of understanding complex issues. Prisons continue to burst at the seams; mothers continue to lose their children to the child welfare system. Many of these children will grow up enmeshed in the very same approach themselves.

For those prisoners trying desperately to make it amongst thousands of brain-eating zombies, it takes a high level of determination, self-control, discipline, and hunger for knowledge to prevail. One cannot become complacent or content with living a mediocre existence. We must resolve, full of hope and great expectation, to push through the current prison manufactured NFO-Zombies, with soul intact, emerging more robust than ever.

FAITH BEHIND BARS

**Sandra Brown #R35900
Lincoln Correctional Center**

No other notion is more questioned, ridiculed, and flat-out rejected than that of faith behind bars. When incarcerated people pursue spiritual transformation, redemption, and restoration, the first question asked is not "Are you happy" or "Are you sure," but "Are you for real?" At best, a prisoner's faith seems to many a foxhole response. We are not sorry for our alleged 'crimes' – only for the consequences, and our spiritual journeys seem nothing more than an attempt to broker a deal with God to get out of prison. At worst, our faith appears a means to an end, a way to muscle and manipulate others with 'thus saith the lord' for money, meals, and a mega-majestic penitentiary life. As an incarcerated woman on her spiritual journey, I cannot deny that such scenarios exist. I pray discernment, guidance, and clarity for them.

Why discernment, guidance, and clarity – as opposed to formal requests for salvation? Like billions of travelers on this journey called life, the naysayers are lost and need direction. Perhaps technology has alleviated that problem with GPS systems, but most drivers at some point have gotten lost. They needed to stop and get guidance from somebody somewhere. Many of us have had to make life-changing decisions, not knowing which choice to make. Sometimes we were forced to choose 'The Lesser of Two Evils,' so to speak, and we can all, I am sure, recall a time when we failed to make the right choice.

Is faith behind bars any less real than faith without bars? Not

if we consider that our most prevalent faith's early founders and leaders were imprisoned, prosecuted, and executed. Very few paroled like Joseph in the bible and lived to talk about it, much less make the difference that saved his family and the entire country. But that is another topic for another time. By dispelling the notion of faith behind bars as jailhouse religion, I hope to show that we are more alike than different.

Since the concept of bars seems to diminish the 'Realness' of an incarcerated person's faith, let us begin there. We live in a time and place where bars (i.e., prison) serve as a cure-all for society's ills, or so we think. Bars lock bad people away and punish them with the loss of freedom. No law-abiding citizen finds herself behind bars, right? While I concede that this is indeed popular opinion, nothing could be further from the truth. I grew up in a household where my mother was worked like a mule, beaten like a runaway slave, and raped like what slave masters called "A belly-warmer" by my father. Neighbors would call the police, who would merely drop him off a few houses away. We paid for it every time. She left once, but he threatened to kill her, me, and my other three siblings. Sometimes she would try to fight back, but she's a small woman, and my father worked construction for decades; the fight was fixed. As a little girl, I prayed for God to free us, to protect us every day. I prayed in between my beatings as well. As a teenage girl, I couldn't understand what made us so "bad," what made this punishment "right." Ask any domestic survivor, and she can assure you that you don't need bars to be in prison. "Bars" lock people in, but they lock us out and away, as evidenced in the Women's Suffrage, Civil Rights, and Gay rights movements. Ask anyone fighting addiction, bankruptcy, or terminal illness, and the truth becomes more

apparent that all kinds of prisons incarcerate all sorts of people.

But no matter what incarcerates us, it is faith that enlightens, encourages, and empowers. Faith operates in believer and non-believer, optimist and pessimist, inmate, and citizen. The church called it "The evidence of things not seen," while others call it Tenacity, goalsetting, or mind manifestations, to name a few. For me, faith is all the above. I operated in it even when I didn't know it, when I didn't realize the power it carried. Because I saw myself as a failure and unworthy of life's blessings, I was a failure. My prayers were answers to everything I did not want. But this is how faith works; it births to life what is conceived in the mind and spirit. I deserved better. Long story short, I was locked up long before I came to prison sixteen years ago.

The paradox of my faith experience is that faith freed me in the last moment of my freedom. I could not see the value of my life until the night I found myself fighting for it. I painfully regret what happened, but through faith, that tragedy shaped the woman, mother, daughter, teacher, grandmother, survivor, and leader I am today. Once I saw what divine faith wanted me to see, I began to want better for myself and my loved ones. Faith allows me to prosper in prison, one of the driest of spiritual places. No, the world is not my oyster-not when I earn thirty dollars a month. But I am a healed, whole person who uses this wilderness experience to make me better, not bitter. To find so priceless and precious a gift means everything to me. Faith – even Behind Bars – calls out and cultivates qualities in us that we never knew or believed we had, responsibility, discipline, and compassion. It resurrects

hope and dreams we didn't think we were allowed to have. With faith, we forgive and are forgiven.

Take away my ID number and place of residence. Think about anyone you know who is incarcerated. How do you encourage them to persevere through their low points and mistakes? Is it not evident that faith behind bars works the same way it does everywhere else? Think about the "bars" that tried to lock you in, out, or away from your sense of self, purpose, or destiny. Is it not evident, then, that faith operates no differently for prisoners than it does for free citizens? I encourage us to remember the words of Bryan Stevenson, who said, "We are so much more than the worst thing we've ever done." Should anyone feel inclined to question the validity of someone's faith who happens to be behind bars, may they remember that we are all just one decision or split-second moment away from a prison sentence, should life decide to show up and test us. Our stories are still being written. May everyone's faith restore them to life, liberty, and love.

Relationships

Part 2.

Prisons are lonely places, separating men and women from their families. As a group, prisoners do not demonstrate stellar social skills and usually have a procession of bad relationships behind them. According to government data, 63% of state prisons are over 100 miles from most prisoners' families, and less than a third of prisoners in state prisons receive a visit from a loved one in a typical month. Relationships, the ability to interact with loved ones - a tender experience - is a voracious desire. Any contact with the outside world is considered a gift and blessing.

12 TIPS FOR DATING A PRISONER

Matthew W. Bey #158836
Minnesota Correctional Facility

You're looking for love, someone to walk your journey with? You've decided to widen your options to include those who are currently incarcerated. You've listed pros and cons and decided, why not? Okay, good luck and be careful.

There are men and women locked up that want to walk that walk with you; people ready to commit and contribute to your life. Some dream of romantic endings; then finding them, they are getting released, moving in, marrying, living happily ever after, and living productive lives with you.

Some want other things, though; money, temporary situations, situations with exclusive benefits to them. So how to find the right one? While patience, perseverance, transparency, and good communication are great, here are a dozen additional points to consider.

1. Have You Asked Yourself Why A Convict?

Why go this route? This is an important step, so list the reasons. Are you having no luck in the free world? Do you

want a situation that more easily justifies your desire to go slowly? Are the restrictions on your time, energy, emotions, and other areas of your life limiting your desirability in 'normal' dating situations? Are you working on your esteem and, for now, need the safety, additional confidence, and security without the boundaries that dating a prisoner might offer? Whatever your reasons, good or bad, sensible, or borderline irrational, knowing and naming them is a huge point to consider for a successful relationship. Know what you bring to the table, what you are lacking, and what you expect of the other.

There is no judging yourself. This is about knowing yourself honestly and your motives. You'll need these truths as an extra foundation to buffer the challenge that awaits a prison relationship.

2. Understand All That Goes Into A Prison Relationship?

Do you know others in this situation? Get to know people in a like situation for support. They can empathize with difficulties as they arise and can be leaned on for advice, especially regarding the lopsided, seemingly one-way aspects that come up. For example, though you may receive a card from the prison canteen, can you accept you'll not be getting breakfast in bed on your birthday? That you want to be held tight after a hard day? How to cope with limited contact and other difficulties? Other sacrifices? How to manage what else may be in store? The more you know upfront, the better prepared you can be.

3. Find Out What They Are Convicted Of

Ask them what they did. This doesn't mean they're likely to do that again (even though that's important to assure). What it does mean is that's part of their history. It tells you what to be mindful of. If they're in for D.U.I. and their first day free, they want to go drinking; maybe that's a heads up.

If they've remained unchanged, though they may never break the law again, they may still carry traits that you don't want in a partner. A robber, drug dealer, person who has assaulted, sexually offended, or taken another's life who

remained unchanged may not be the best choice. Know what they are in for and what, if anything, they've done to change, to better themselves. Ask about their conviction and the circumstances that led up to their choice.

4. Ask When They're Getting Out

Do they have an outdate? Some may find having a partner in such a limited capacity a plus. I don't know, but if it works for you, then good. Others may want someone weeks from returning to society. I suggest meeting someone with a bit of time left. Give yourself a minimum of three or more months to get to know this person. Why so long compared to normal? Because this isn't a normal situation. You can find a jewel anywhere, anywhere at all – but when at a garage sale, be careful. There is a reason for discounted prices. The extra time gives you the best opportunity to know them and solidify whatever foundation you can. That may enable you to withstand the weight that will go with their return to society.

5. Are Your Expectations Realistic?

How do you envision the relationship? Give it a try and see how it goes? Find a person who'll fall in love with you, get out, and help raise your kids? Help financially? Fix the wrongs in your life? Maybe these aren't your thoughts, but I've heard stranger. Whatever your expectations, be realistic with them. If you imagine the person's return to society easy, the time with them while they're in prison is easy, maybe change your perspective. Be mindful that many prisoners getting out have no money, and if they do, their immediate goal most likely will be to stabilize themselves and get situated.

It is so important to have that talk as soon as possible and to update that continually. What do you expect, anticipate? What do they?

6. Have They Been To Segregation?

While in jail, are they still going to jail? If they're locked up and getting more locked up, that is a sign. The response from friends was funny when I showed them this. They were like, wait, but I've been to segregation, and so have you. Okay, true, so maybe once isn't harmful or twice. It depends on the

situation. Mainly it is on you to know how they're living. If they're reckless in here, without a concern for the losses (meager as they are), what might they sacrifice out there? Remember, you may start your search for a loved one here, but ideally, you want them to come home and stay home. If they're in prison for assault and going to segregation for fighting frequently, that's a clue. If they are in for robbery and go to the hole for stealing food from the chow hall, that's a clue. What are their priorities?

7. What Do They Do With Their Free Time?

Across the U.S., the prisons are different. Perhaps some aren't allowed to work elsewhere, but in Minnesota, all are. If the person doesn't work or go to school while in prison, what do you think they'll do when free? The same thing. In here, there is time, more time, and then there is extra time to do most of what you want to do. If they can't make time for work here where skills are of no real consequences, what will they do out there?

If their time is spent watching all the T.V. series and talk shows; if they play cards all day? If you don't mind this, great, but know to inquire ahead of time, so you at least have a heads up. There are opportunities in here to better oneself; is your prospective partner taking advantage of them?

8. Are You Sexually Compatible?

In the absence of conjugal visits, how do you know if you're sexually compatible? Phone conversations and erotic letter writing are ways to gauge if a spark exists. It's also a way to discern what other issues may be at hand. For example, during a talk, are they more inhibited than you'd like? Too explicit? Do they talk about things you've never heard of or thought to try before? Do they have a preoccupation with sex?

Every bit of information is a clue to better knowing your potential partner. This is one of the safest ways to test compatibility while your potential partner is still locked up.

9. Who Is On Their Visiting List?

Who comes to see them? Do they have multiple names

there? Do they have a lot of women friends? If they aren't okay with you seeing their approved visiting list, is there a reason why? Perhaps those women genuinely are friends, but maybe those names are competition. Like you, others are looking for love as well. Prisoners have access to their list; ask for a copy. While looking at it, see how many family members there are.

10. Are Their Family Ties Intact?

Do they stay in contact? Are they estranged from them? What level of communication do they have? People who have more connections tend to do better upon release, giving you and your relationship one less struggle to manage.

Some families lacked closeness before their loved one coming to prison. In other situations, the separation was in direct correlation to their behaviors. Did they sell the family television? Did they steal silverware, jewelry, the family dog?

If they're unable to mend family ties, this could indicate they lack the desire to.

If family relations are stable, when it's time, ask for introductions. This prison environment is so sterilized and neutral it doesn't lend itself to showing off personality. For their naturally occurring mannerisms and quirks, family accounts can add a depth of understanding for you. Seeing photos with their family, having the ability to hear them talk in their family's presence, all these can help you.

11. Is There False Advertising At Play?

Is this person who they say they are? What are the subtle and glaring misrepresentations? We all have them, even in the free world. Women have their hair extensions and whatever other enhanced aspects to them, and men do as well.

Everyone has 'Photo' clothes and 'Visit' clothes that look nicer than their other clothes. There is no deception at work there, but the disparity between one's daily clothing and 'special' clothes is a clue. Some, if you see them daily, you'd think they never got out of bed, with the wrinkles and such. You know when they have visits because, suddenly, they clean up.

This leads me to ask, are they who they say they are? Are they

that nice, sweet, and loving? There are many ways to make money; selling artwork and such, but one is letter writing. People pay others to write their letters, so they won't appear undereducated, needy with words. When getting to know someone, be sure you're getting to know them.

12. What Are They Committed To?

Do they have other obligations when getting out? When the two of you discuss plans, are the talks surrounding **THEIR** plans, **THEIR** dreams, what **THEY** need, and what **THEY** are going to do? Be sure your relationship is two-way.

A benefit for extending your options to include those incarcerated may consist of a higher level of captivated interest and a heightened receptivity in you and a relationship. Love can be found anywhere, and with work, it can flourish. But! Be mindful and be careful. There will be naturally enough difficulties in developing a relationship; don't let the above add to them. Have realistic expectations and be wary. There are scammers and those with the limited capacity to grow to know others on a deeper level honestly; hopefully, these tips help you differentiate between the two. Good luck.

HER FIDELITY CAN'T BE AN ISSUE

**Kelly Hayes #0581774
Mountain View Correctional Institution**

Life is to be lived, not wasted! So why do we get locked up, then expect our girlfriends and wives to be locked up too? That is crazy and very unfair! Fellas, do yourself a favor and let your woman live; her fidelity should not be an issue. You are not there; you cannot stop her from doing whatever she wants to do. That's her life, her body, her heart, and her soul. So be a man and embrace, no matter what she chooses to do. And if you do that right, she will always choose you because you are supportive; you love her even more through these challenging times.

Do you think because you are in prison, it's simply hard for you? Take your mind off you, and place it on her, the one out there raising the kids, working, and paying the bills. Why can't she go out to a club, and shake her booty, to let off a bit of steam? Why can't she go out to eat with another man, why can't she have a friend or two? Are you trying to police her? Are you her prison guard now? Man, calm down, let baby girl live, and I promise you will have a better relationship.

Would you rather have your girl lying to you about where she was last night and who she was with? She can tell you this because you understand. You say, "baby, it's okay for you to do your thing. I get it." As men on the inside, we must be bold, mature, and love our women unconditionally. Put your big boy pants on and let your woman live, embrace who she is because they don't need us. You may think this guy is just saying all this stupid stuff, but the truth is, I'm the President of the Let HERR Live club! Last night was Valentine's Day, my girl T.T. went to her friend Dollar's house; they ate Chinese food and enjoyed the rest of their night! How do I know this? She told me. We have brutal heartfelt honesty, and I love that about her. I have eight more years in here, so why should she be miserable and shrivel up and die to make me happy? Perhaps

there will be more "Dollars," but I'm not worried about them because I've got her heart and soul, and I know how to communicate with her.

While she is out there with him, she is still with me. I am always and will be the only consistent one in her life. I can't "break her off" the way that she needs to be broken off, so I let her live, and she loves me for that. We have a fantastic relationship. I talk to her regularly on the phone; we laugh and cut up the whole time, saying, 'I love you a lot.'

It's a known fact that our girls see other men while we are locked up. The question is, what type of man are you? My girl calls me superman because I do super incredible things that most men locked are afraid to do. Above all, I let my girl live. I'm the one locked up, not her. I want T.T to be happy. I will not be her prison and then get all heartbroken and mad if she escapes. She deserves the freedom to do what she wants. She chooses to be with me, and for me, she is my blessing, and I will always treat her exactly like that! Give your girl some space, some room to breathe, and she will see how much you love her because you finally put her feelings first! To make your relationship work from the inside, her fidelity can't be an issue. LET HER LIVE.

HOME FOR NEW YEAR'S DAY: HOW I WOULD CELEBRATE!

**Daniel Gwynn #CW5179
State Correctional Institution – Greene**

Every year, I'd dream that this would be the year that I would make it home for New Year's Day, free from my unjust incarceration. Although I have family/friends (no spouse or children) I don't think I'd be ready to face them. So, I'd take a trip to a brothel out in Nevada called "The Bunny Ranch" and spend a few days decompressing.

I realize that this decision may arouse a bit of controversy, but it's not as salacious as it sounds. I've been locked down for more than 20-years in long-term solitary confinement without human contact. This deprivation has caused severe mental and physical deterioration that I haven't been able to alleviate. I've lived inside a bubble, erecting a myriad of barriers to survive my incarceration and to compensate for the lack of human contact. I don't particularly appreciate being touched, and I don't communicate very well with people. There are no programs in here to help me cope with any of this.

My family/friends would like to see me, but I don't think I could handle such a gathering soon. I presume they would want a coming home party, with expectations that I wouldn't be ready to face. I've endured a daily psychological battle with guards and convicts, fighting off institutional indoctrination and social subjugation of my freedoms of speech and movement. Also, I can only visit my family/ friends in a non-contact environment where we are separated by a Plexiglas barrier under the watchful eye of security. There are no transitional re-entry programs for death row prisoners fraught by pent-up resentment and psychological torment. Transitioning back into a human being isn't as easy as flipping on a switch.

The benefits of seeking professional, social companionship

aren't just about the apparent sexual encounter. There was a TV special called "The Bunny Ranch." It depicted the brothel life that the public does not see and often misunderstand. The women don't get paid just to have sex. They're paid for their companionship as well. They have no expectations other than to be treated with respect and to get paid. In return, they provide a therapeutic atmosphere of service catered to the customer's needs and desires. I could open up to her in a way that I couldn't with anyone else. She'd also come with an element of discretion that I'd need to expel my demons and tear down those barriers so I can vent or cry without judgment.

I believe this experience would help me decompress, so I'd have the makings to re-enter society unencumbered by my debilitating afflictions caused by prison solitary confinement. Whether dinner and dancing, a spa day with a hot bath and massage, multiple rounds of passionate sex, or just a long walk and conversation, I would celebrate being home in a therapeutic environment, away from expectations or obligations, so I can feel human again.

“BABY DADDY” Domestic Violence Part 1

**Teresa Liggin #24989-047
Federal Medical Center, Carswell**

Let me start by saying I am a survivor of abuse. Abuse comes in many forms, but it is and always will be called domestic violence at the end of the day. See, when you are outside looking in, you see things like love, caring, and healthy relationships among family members. I used to think my momma was crazy for leaving my daddy when he hit her. But I found out later in life, what he was doing was wrong. He could have killed my mom. Also, he could have killed my two sisters and me.

When you love somebody, and it's 100%, you don't see the red flags dangling in your face. I can remember when my daughter's father hit me. I thought he loved me because that's the only time he paid any attention to me. He would only love me behind closed doors. In public, I was just another black, bald-headed girl. At least that's what he would tell me. He never even once acknowledged me outside of the bedroom. Even though I was fourteen years old, I knew what he was doing to me was wrong. I didn't care. I thought it was love, even when he started flirting with my friends. I still didn't see the mask he was wearing. I guess you can say I get it from my momma (L.O.L.). I know it's not a laughing matter, but sometimes you laugh to keep from crying. All I knew about relationships was the one I saw with my momma and daddy. If he hit you, that meant he loved you, right? Hell no. I was wrong in all areas.

When you love someone, it's not supposed to hurt...no matter if it's a man or a woman. Abuse is abuse. It does not have a face. You and no other person should have to be scared to speak your mind because you don't want to be hit. As I said, my first experience with domestic violence came out at me when I was just a teenager, but it went on all through my adult life.

When my man hit me, I thought he loved me because that's what he would always say to me after he beat me for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. He may have even hit me a couple of times for snacks in between meals.

Finally, I got fed up with him hitting on me. I made up my mind I was going to let him go... but every time he would say those three magic words, "I love you," all was good. I was in paradise again. Finally, I had enough, and I left him. Then I found out I was pregnant with my daughter, so you already know what happened next. Yeah, you right...I went back to him. That didn't last long 'cause, like R. Kelly said, "When a woman's fed up, there ain't nothing you could do about it." Oh, how true his words were. I had the guts to leave him. This time I didn't go back. I stayed away...until he would call asking to see his daughter. He did not give two flying fish about his daughter or me. He just didn't want to see me with anybody else.

One day (while me and my baby were visiting him) he got mad because I would not have sex with him. I called my new man and told him to pick us up. What the hell did I do that for? Before I knew what happened, he jumped up and punched me in my forehead and called me all kinds of bitches. That didn't stop me from trying to get my stuff and leave. He blocked the front door so that we couldn't get out. I even tried calling the police, but he snatched the telephone from my hand. We started arguing until my tongue cut his ass in two. I didn't back down. I stood my ground until he punched me dead in the center of my head with a closed fist. Next thing I knew, I had put my daughter down, put my fists up, and I was ready to beat him down. I knew how to fight anyway, 'cause my dad would make me shadow box myself when I was young.

When he came towards me this time, I gave him a three-piece (L.O.L.). Then, I started beating him like a runaway slave. He didn't know what hit him, but I did because I picked up a paint can and busted his head to the white meat when he came at me. His brother was standing there watching him beat

my ass all this time, but as soon as I went to work with the paint can, he came running to the rescue!

That didn't stop us from fighting. We were going heads up, toe to toe, and he realized I was getting the best of him. He picked up a steel pole and tried to hit me with it. I ran and picked up my daughter and tried to get away from him because I could see it in his eyes; he wanted to do some damage. As I was running, he started catching up with me. I was scared he was going to hit my baby with the pole. I slowed down and dropped her on the ground. Good thing she wasn't hurt. I had no other choice. I thought he was going to hit her with the pole. I knew I had to get her and get out of harm's way.

Even though my baby girl did a few flips in the air when I dropped her, she came out without any injury. That was the last time we fought because after I put that knot in his head, he didn't want no more of me. He said I was crazy. I didn't care what he thought. It is not right for a man to beat women and children. The same goes for women; we shouldn't abuse men or children either.

Domestic violence is on the rise. Many women are scared and afraid, but I'm here to tell you, take out an application on a man and ask him a series of questions. If he agrees to your terms, make sure he signs his John Hancock. If he violates the contract, kick his dirty ass to the curb. Look for red flags in the beginning of the relationship. If you do not know them, I'm offering a few here. I learned this from experience and classes for abuse and domestic violence for women.

- 1.) If he called you ten to twenty times a day saying he loves you and misses you; red flag... it is a lie. He is trying to see who you with or what you are doing. It is not love, so don't be fooled.
- 2.) If he's nice to you in the beginning, buying flowers, taking out your trash, or fixing things around your house, red flag... it's a lie. As soon as you let him move in, he will stop doing all these things. He will become Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

3.) If he is always trying to keep you from spending time with your family or friends, red flag. He is trying to isolate you from others, so he will be the only one you need.

4.) If he's telling you what to wear or how to act, red flag. He is trying to control you and what you do.

5.) If he tries to issue money out to you, so you only have enough to handle the house and the bills, red flag. He wants you to depend on him and wants you to be broke to have no money if you're going to leave.

Make yourself a Bill of Rights.

1. I can wear what I want

2. I can have a job

3. I can leave the house without your permission

4. I have a right to my own opinion

5. I can have friends and family over

These are things you want him to know before you start dating him. If he will agree to these terms, have him sign and date the Bill of Rights. It might seem childish or stupid, but in the end, it will save your life. You never know. If he says no, I will not sign the Bill of Rights, then kick him to the curb and tell him to call K.I.M. KEEP IT MOVING (L.O.L.).

TIL DEATH DO US PART

**Sandra Brown #R35900
Lincoln Correctional Center**

Dating sites like Match.com and eHarmony claim that one in eight of their matches results in marriage. Global technology has indeed revolutionized love and romance today. Finding that special someone is just a mouse click away because countless dating sites exist.

What doesn't come instantly with the click of that mouse is the work and commitment that it takes to keep that special someone. Once we've gotten to know our lover's representative--you know, the person who won you over initially with that stellar first impression--we meet the real person, complete with those quirks and qualities that we missed because those warm, fuzzy feelings blinded us.

That over half of marriages end in divorce, even higher statistics exist where one marriage partner is incarcerated, points to a staggering need for us to understand and heal ourselves. As easy as pointing fingers at our exes may seem, we will fail at maintaining loving, meaningful relationships until we acknowledge that it takes two to create the relationships we have and own the parts we play in creating them. While whether the fault is ours and/or our partners may vary, three of the most common reasons couples divorce (or, if dating, break up) remain the same.

Reason #1: Misrepresentation. We may have married our spouse's representative rather than the real person. I believe in love at first sight, but the kind of love needed for a successful marriage takes time. Unfortunately, cyberdating allows people to be whoever they imagine, whether that image is true or not. Nev Shulman's MIV show "Catfish" exposes countless instances of lovers tricked by representatives. Still, many of us fall head-first in love and move way too fast only to crash and burn in the heartbreak and disappointment. Even when we date "off the grid," sometimes we think on those first few

dates we've met the right one, forgetting that they, like we, are working hard to make that great first impression.

But relationships with representatives lack T.I.M.E. Transparency, Intimacy, Maturity, and Endurance. The real men or women may be nothing like the representatives we've married, which bases any intimacy shared on lies. Therefore, the connection is immature and cannot endure the challenges and changes that produce solid, loving marriages. T.I.M.E. produces a love that lasts for all time. At the very least, T.I.M.E. will reveal any red flags or deal-breakers for us. Reason #2: Selfishness. Sometimes we get so comfortable in our relationships or marriages that we take our partners for granted. Somewhere down the line, love became something to do rather than something to cherish. Selfishness causes our relationship paradigms to shift from a "we" mentality to a "me" mentality. We lose sight of our partner's needs because all we seem to care about is what we want. Essentially, we put our mates on the backburner when we minimize or invalidate what matters to the people we claim to love.

One-way relationships are guaranteed one-way tickets to divorces and breakups. Selfishness lies at the root of failed relationships: infidelity, money, abuse, abandonment, etc. Love requires a degree of selflessness: not losing self or thinking less of self, but think of your mate more often. Remember how what mattered to him or her mattered to you and get back to that. A little thoughtfulness and kindness go a long way for the man or woman who loves you. By tending to your spouse's needs, you tend to your happy spouse, happy house, right?

Reason #3: Forgiveness. This is the biggest reason that relationships fail. We held this desired yet unrealistic expectation of the perfect marriage to the perfect spouse but found out that he or she--just like us--is flawed. Some wrongs are more severe than others (abuse, infidelity, and abandonment, to name a few), but all have the potential for forgiveness if both partners are open to and active in the healing process. Forgiveness may not always heal a

relationship, but it heals the wronged and the one who committed it. We must take what I call the ROAD approach: recognize the wrong. "Call a thing a thing," as Iyanla Vanzant often says in her show, "Iyanla: Fix My Life." We can't call a lie a half-truth if we weren't honest. Emotional affairs and sexting are still infidelities. We can't heal what we won't acknowledge.

Reason #4: Own responsibility. Fault-finding and finger-pointing bring neither healing nor forgiveness. Neither does revenge ever justify hurting our life partners. We hold on to anger, resentment, and unforgiveness when we defend our wrongs with "you made me do it... it's your fault... if you hadn't done/said this, then I wouldn't have—you get the picture. Likewise, we cannot deliberately mistreat our lovers and expect them to stay. We can own responsibility for our actions without beating ourselves or our partners up with these words: "I was wrong. I apologize." That's it. Period.

Reason #5: Ask forgiveness. We might get it today; we might not get it today; we might not get it at all from him or her.

Asking forgiveness, however, shows your partner that:

You care about how he or she feels.

You are remorseful.

You want to make the relationship right between you. Given enough T.I.M.E., couples, if they genuinely love each other with the kind of love that successful relationships have, will find forgiveness in their hearts. Even in the worst-case scenario, the moment we recognize our wrongs, own responsibility, and ask forgiveness, we've begun the healing process and will be able to forgive ourselves. This will then make us better people for future relationships.

Reason #6: Demonstrate trustworthiness. None of the other steps mean anything without a demonstration of intention. Trust has been broken, and it needs to be fixed if divorce or breaking up is not the end goal. Incarceration can make this step more challenging, but not impossible. Communication builds trust. I cannot stress that enough. Write to each other regularly, weekly, biweekly, monthly, whatever works for you

as a couple. Calls can get expensive, but hearing each other's voices makes fighting for the relationship worth it. Work out how often to call and stick with it. Visits mean everything to an incarcerated partner. It is a demonstration that we are loved, we are thought about, and we matter. Study after study has proven how vital physical contact is to human development. Our social, psychological, and emotional well-being hinges on human communication, whether we are locked up or not. Physical distance makes visits impossible sometimes, which is why those letters and phone calls are so important. It's a way for both partners to demonstrate trustworthiness. If incarceration is not a factor, then demonstrating trustworthiness becomes less challenging physically but challenging nonetheless. We demonstrate it by establishing and keeping two things: our word and our boundaries. Be there for our partners. Be where we say we will be. Be mindful of what jeopardized the relationship and avoid that at all costs! Be that demonstration of trust and with T.I.M.E., those relationship problems will be a thing of the past.

DEAR DAUGHTER

**Shawn L. Perrot CDCR# V-42461
California Men's Colony**

It's hard to believe, but this coming Thursday day marks the beginning of your 16th year in this world. It's an important milestone for you. First, there's the obvious: getting your driver's license, one of the single most important steps toward a teenager's growing sense of independence. But we tend to become focused on the obvious and overlook the small, often hidden things in life, and these are the things that usually end up hurting us the most when we least expect it.

This year marks the official start in your journey towards becoming an adult. As exciting as that prospect may appear, it's also filled with responsibilities and pitfalls that often overwhelm the unprepared. Think about it like this: choosing the right thing to eat, or not to eat, cannot only affect your day today, it can also have a lasting impact decades later. Maybe we skipped a meal because we were in a hurry, and before you know it, we don't even bother with breakfast, the most important meal of the day. Or maybe we are so busy that we just didn't take out the time to eat right, snatching the first, calorie-laden thing that appeals to us. That decision inevitably leads to not exercising, and these factors can lead to being overweight, diabetes, heart problems, and death. Your choices in the coming year are very much the same, so don't rush through things. Take a moment and think about the consequences of your actions, good and bad, immediate and long-term. I wish I'd done that because, if I had, I wouldn't be behind bars right now, crying, because I've yet to speak with my daughter or see her.

If I could teach you one thing, it would be this: don't make the mistake of learning your lessons the hard way. Instead, learn your lessons from the mistakes others have made. I guarantee there's not one thing you could ever do wrong that someone else hasn't already done. So look around, ask

questions, get the facts, and then make up your mind about what you want to do. If you do this, your life will be so much better than mine ever was, and that's all a parent ever wants for a child, to be better, to do better.

What do you think is the biggest mistake I ever made in life? Not knowing anything about me (other than I'm in prison), I'd be willing to bet you think it had something to do with committing a crime; but nothing could be farther from the truth. Don't misunderstand; criminal activity is wrong. I've made huge mistakes, even if I dispute the accuracy or number, but my crimes resulted from my choices as a child, mainly my choice of friends.

As adults, we don't always know what's best for us, no matter what we say to the contrary, and children are even less able to tackle daunting situations. Children - "young adults" - look at the here and now, especially in a modern world of Internet' instant gratification. You simply can't comprehend your actions' effects because you haven't lived long enough to understand how permanent some actions genuinely are. Regardless, it falls on parents or guardians, adults, to help young adults make those decisions until they can comprehend the short and long-term consequences, good and bad, of their actions. For me, I devoted neither time, patience, nor willingness to try to understand this. As a child in an abusive home, I just knew that every decision my mother made was wrong, so I stopped listening. Before long, I was hanging out with others who felt and acted the same as I did; these were almost always much older people, and, like any younger kid trying to impress his newfound older friends, I was quick to say and do just about anything to fit in. They were quick to use my enthusiasm to their advantage, asking me to do things even they weren't willing to do. Even though I knew what I was doing was wrong, I did it anyway, choosing lousy behavior with "friends" over my abusive home environment.

I'm not trying to blame any of these people for the decisions I made, either then or later in the future. I had choices, and I chose to hang around them, knowing full well that they were

up to no good, just using me and that what I was doing was wrong. I willingly made negative choices, even though I'd later try to convince myself and others that my home environment justified my behaviors. Ultimately, my choices led me to prison.

I tell you about this because my path today is a direct result of my decisions when I was your age. Sixteen years old is well on the way to becoming an adult but still highly impressionable, and people who are aware of this will use it to their advantage regardless of how it affects you. Be wary of your choices in the coming year, not just because of the harm it might cause you here and now but also because of the potential for harm years down later. You've been through so much already and handled it far better than I ever did; it would be a shame to give it all up because of a series of poor decisions made now. I ask you. I beg you. Pick your friends with utmost care. The people you hang around with today will influence, in large part, the development of the person you become later in life. Most, if not all, of the people I considered friends as a child ended up in jail, prison, or dead, and for a good reason. I don't want to see that happen to you; the single largest mistake I ever made was my choice of friends as a child. If I could go back and do one thing over, I would choose different friends. Good friends, positive friends, have the potential to pull you up, but bad friends, negative friends, will always pull you down into the very bowels of hell if you let them.

Still, you should know that even the best, most positive friends don't make the right decisions all the time. When that day comes, and it will, you need to be strong enough to stand up for what's right, even if that means losing a friend. The closer you are to them and the more intent they are on doing wrong, the more difficult it's going to be, but you need to muster up the courage to do what's right. I promise you that you'll be glad that you did the right thing, even if they aren't. Good decisions separate upstanding men from the boys, or in your case, the women from the foolish girls.

As you struggle through your 16th year, take a moment to look both behind and in front of you. What impact have you made? How have you affected those in your social circle? I understand that you're doing mentor work with younger kids. I'm proud of you, but words are, at this moment in time, all I have to offer, so know that my heart is nearly bursting with pride at what you've already overcome. Rather than allowing your situation to define you, you've risen to the top, like the cream in milk. You have decided to make the most of it, using your misfortune to help others who are about to embark on the journey you started long ago.

But don't be fooled and don't get complacent. Your journey has just begun. Make plans. Come up with a list of goals you want to achieve in the order you wish to do them, and don't let anything get in your way. If you need help, ask. Someone, somewhere, will always be willing to help, but that doesn't mean that you should accept the first offer that comes your way. Remember, everything that glitters is not gold. You're going to find that life will often send you people who appear to want the best for you but who have ulterior motives, the likes of which you could never begin to comprehend. At the same time, don't let that deter you. The world is also full of wonderful people, located in places you'd never expect. Examine each that comes into your life, and make your decision based on facts available to you, not emotions; if facts aren't available, do research and find data to help you make the best decisions.

I wish I could be there with you as you take this next step in the journey we call life but, MY poor choices won't let me. I know that what I've said probably isn't going to do much here and now to help ease the pain and loneliness you're undoubtedly feeling. But, it is my hope that one day you'll realize that I've always been here for you, even if you were never aware. Love always, your father.

A FATHER'S DAY LETTER TO MY FATHER

**Richard Atkins, Jr. CDCR #G32466
High Desert State Prison**

Damn. How Ima say to this dude? I remember being kicked out of the house 'cause I looked just like you. Often your side of the family said I'd be nothing but a crook, just like you and that I wouldn't live to see 18! You never taught me how to fight, ride a bike, none of those things.

I wanted to walk just like you, wanted to talk just like you, but you were an abusive dad. As if it were yesterday, I can still remember you slapping my mother and tossing your glass of Christian Brothers or E&J in her face because she made you mad.

You made me an animal by not allowing me as a child to shed tears 'cause you felt that was a weakness. You left me, my little sister Niresha and my mother Lavinia to fend for ourselves, and that cold exit left us hungry. I used to ask my mommy why you left us?

Why didn't you love us? And I don't know why, but she would always take up for you.

I thought my mother was cheating on you or something, only to find out that it was just you and your insecurities. You left me alone to survive off food stamps, to take baths using socks as washcloths and sheets up over the windows for blinds! I was scared out of my mind after you left us. You abandoned me, your family, and me and my sister developed cold sweats had nightmares and would pee in the bed, afraid.

I remembered the nights me and my little sister ate syrup sandwiches, and my mommy went to sleep hungry. I saw the tears in my beautiful mother's face, and, as an 8-year-old, I didn't understand her pain or comprehend our life living below the poverty line, unsure about what it meant to be living in the ghetto. If not for my mother's brothers, I probably wouldn't be a strong man today. Do you even remember February 23rd being my birthday?

You left us without any explanations or even excuses and, by the age of 10, I was in the system! Many juvenile hall trips and beatings by my fellow inmates, but I always was brave enough to fight back. I have your genetics and so I was a big, young man and that gave me a layer of protection against older guys punching me. I had to grow up fast, dude, so I started doing hundreds of pushups and sit-ups to build a more muscular frame. I was scared, man, but being raised around family in Galilee Missionary Baptist Church in Stockton, California taught me to believe in God...though my prayers were never answered, until I got older and saw that I had survived the cold world thus far. That's when I knew there was a God somewhere in the Heavens, watching over my young wild, and crazy nights and days.

Around August or September 2003, we were cellmates housed at Deuel Vocational Institution (DVI), Tracy, CA. As cellmates, I learned of your struggles as a kid, raised by a single parent, your heroin addiction, and B.G.F affiliation throughout the mid-'80s, '90s, into the 21st century. Because I adopted your lifestyle, I was a convict at the age of 15! I was frustrated and filled with a lot of pain and anger, which caused my mommy a lot of pain. But, today, I am strong, wise beyond my years, and a businessman, too. And I owe all this success through stormy weather to my beautiful mother and God. So, thank you and mom for bringing me into this world. God bless. And I forgive you, dad.

INVISIBLE LETTER

Thomas Ford #91457-004
Federal Correctional Facility

We've all heard the phrase "out of sight, out of mind," without giving much consideration to the power of the statement. However, for the men and women serving time in our country's jails and prisons, it has a one, two punch effect on our daily existence.

It's not hard to understand that in today's world, people are busier than ever. With work, family obligations, and daily chores, it's easy to push the thought of your incarcerated loved one from the forefront of your mind. But for us, we aren't burdened by many daily obligations; thus we spend most of our time thinking about our friends and family members. Whether it be past situations or future fantasies of the day we are released, our thoughts poignantly express that you're "out of sight" is never out of mind for us.

You can imagine then that daily mail call is one of the few events we look forward to. As each of us huddle around waiting to hear our name called, many will only receive the "invisible letter." Even though it is rarely spoken aloud, the disappointment of receiving these "letters" day after day plays across many of our collective faces.

But even if you do every so often send greetings, you don't have to wait for a holiday or special occasion to share your love with those in prison. One of the most thoughtful and enduring things you can do is send a "thinking of you" card when it's least expected. Of course, there are several other ways to let your favorite prisoner know that you are thinking of them — be creative!

Spend a day with the kids taking photos to send, especially to us. Maybe have the kids make homemade cards to send. We can all use puzzles and game books to pass the time. Magazine subscriptions are an excellent way to remind your loved one each month how much you care. Perhaps you read a good

book and would like to pass it along; check with your respective prison to see if it's allowed to be sent in.

A postcard that reads "I love you" will go a long way in lifting our spirits and helping the days go by quicker, knowing you took just a few moments of your day to make our day special.

Even if you don't personally know a prisoner but would like to cheer our day, countless inmate pen pal websites are on the Internet. What a joyful bliss you could instill in someone just by sending a note saying, "You aren't forgotten." "I'm praying for you" or "You're a special person." Sometimes the smallest gesture on your part can make the greatest difference to those behind bars. As I was contemplating this topic for the column this month, my cellmate found a poem he had hidden away and read it to me. Because no name was attributed to this piece, I can't give credit to the author, but I include it here:

The strangest thing happened to me today, an invisible mailman passed my way and gave me a letter that wasn't there.

Because invisible mail is so rare, I opened this nothing wide, only to find even less inside.

The penmanship was neat and clean, so clear it couldn't even be seen. The fragrance so sweet as I recall, in fact I could smell nothing at all.

So, I'm writing you back with love you can bet, to say thanks for the letter I never did get. Even though I sit content behind this wall, I am enjoying this long letter I never got at all.

So, when I'm out there where things are better, that's when I will remember your invisible letter.

[LEAVE BOOK REVIEW | My Site 2 \(wixsite.com\)](http://My Site 2 (wixsite.com))

You Should Know

Part 3.

We can never have too many nuggets of wisdom and positive life lessons to make life better, safer, more fulfilling. In this section, prisoners offer busy family members great advice, including goal setting, personal safety, protecting your home, your purse, and how to raise a daughter to make smart sexual choices.

DEAR YOUNGSTER

David Perryman #AB1204 LA2
California State Prison

You can go in and out of prison all your life and miss out on backyard barbeques, birthdays, parties, holidays, babies being born, watching sunsets with a girlfriend, a hug from grandma, house tag with the children, that good feeling from a hard day's work and going home, a good movie with friends at the theater; being chased and tackled by a band of puppies; sporting events with friends, falling on ice skates trying to learn; voting and, the big one, breathing free air. The air seems different when you're free. So why miss out on all that?

I try to slam this idea into the heads of troubled youths who believe prison is a badge of honor. This approach must be made repeatedly, with good delivery and style. It does work with time. Do you want to be sixty years old, coming in and out of prison, missing life? Think about it.

I am a firm believer in the scared straight program. Telling youngsters about the horrors of prison has an excellent effect of deterring some young people from prison. But it won't work for all youngsters. Some young people, you can't scare straight and must use a different approach. But, I tell them, of course, you can handle prison, and it will be no problem to you. You are a young soldier and can handle the gang fights,

guard brutality, dirty showers, poor food, lockdowns, away from family and friends, etc. But see, that is just the issue, they can handle it, and it is no problem—at first.

The problem I tell the youth I see in prison with them seeing prison as no problem and they can handle it is, yeah, youngster,

I know your life beginning to end,
hood life, you won't bend.

Prison means nothing to you,
you're a soldier, true and true
but I tell you, young one,
miss'en life ain't no fun.

You'll become like me miss'en it all,
At the park play'en basketball.

grandma tell'en you stories of old,
Hugg'en your girlfriend all so bold.

Movies and picnics all so happy,
backyard barbeque with the whole family.

Sunsets and slow walks in the park,
Those cool party's after dark.

Yeah, youngster, you miss it all coming in and out of this place.

Is that your life? What a waste.

AN EX-COP CONVICT TALKS ABOUT “US vs THEM”

**Edwin Garcia, 92A9233
Shawangunk Correctional**

As a former cop, I understand that the demands and stress of the “job” force a person to change to get the job done. But this same survival mechanism also can and does lead to the type of incidents taking over the news.

The public does not understand that there is a disconnect between themselves and the people in law enforcement, their “protectors.” It makes no difference whether it’s a police officer, correction guard, parole officer, or federal agent. Unfortunately, when you become a member of a law enforcement agency, there is a “US vs. THEM” mindset that takes over our thinking. In a short time, your attitude changes, and a lack of empathy becomes part of your being.

Think about it, a police officer shoots a man in the back, like he was shooting deer. The incident in Baltimore is another clear example of this lack of empathy. When someone in law enforcement starts seeing people through the eyes of a sociopath, it’s time to take that officer off the road and give him re-retraining or treatment.

When I was a cop, I witnessed many examples of police behavior that, in these times, would have led to an indictment. To some cops, “criminals” were to be treated as objects and not as people. That’s why I used the term of sociopath. They, too, see their victims as objects.

People don’t realize that someone falls into the clutches of the “Justice system,” they stop being “people” and become objects to process—forced to undress, to squat and open their body orifices, to get de-loused and put back in dank cells, forgotten about. That is the reality of being arrested and jailed in America.

Police departments should be forced to give added training to their officers. Training that would help them combat or eliminate the “US v. THEM” mindset. It would be an annual

attitude adjustment. This retraining should be done repeatedly throughout an officer's career.

I know that some readers of this article will scoff at my suggestion. But I have seen cops who have taken that negative attitude to heart and who have greatly abused their powers over those they detain. I have witnessed detained people being slapped with telephone books, hung upside down in police garages, beaten in the middle of a highway by a mob of cops. Or as in the "Louima case" sodomized with a nightstick. These behaviors are those of sociopaths – officers who don't see the "criminal" as a person but as animals. When you have this type of mindset, your mind becomes open to all kinds of negative behaviors.

It takes little effort to go from using force to arrest a "criminal" to using the same force to hurt "the animal." Not all cops are bad. But too many cops fall prey to a mindset that permeates police culture, and they get little to no training on how to fight it. The "Us v. Them" attitude is a disease that runs rampant throughout the law enforcement community. If departments ignore this problem, incidents as those currently in the news will continue to occur.

HOW TO SERVE A PRISON SENTENCE

India Porter #428587

Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility

I want to report that my imprisonment here has had the opposite of its intended effect. Instead of being squelched, the message has prospered. After serving almost 20 years in the Michigan Department of Corrections and sharing my story with countless women and young girls, this experience has not only saved me but taught me how to enhance my life. So, for those on your way or already sitting in prison, I want to let you know that even though at this moment your sentence may feel like an impossible burden, a change in perspective and diligent hard work can become a setup for the most fantastic come back of your life!

I am an expert on serving a prison sentence and becoming a better person in the process. I remember reading "Outwitting The Devil" by Napoleon Hill. A section in his book talks about how some of life's most successful people did not realize their greatness until they found themselves in dire or hopeless situations. In these moments, they were introduced to their other selves. This revelation set off alarm bells within me because I was familiar with this experience. I didn't know how to describe what I had experienced. At 28 years old, I discovered my "other self" when I was sentenced to 25-40 years in prison.

WHO I USED TO BE

I grew up on the east side of Detroit, on Sheridan street, right off Mack Avenue. If you talk to anyone familiar with Detroit's east side, they will help you understand what being from Mack Avenue means. Usually, nothing else needs to be said. By the time I was 13 years old, I worked in the underground, after-hour strip clubs, using what I had to get what I wanted. I had a pretty face and a woman's body. As can be imagined, my view on life was immature and distorted. No one could tell me anything. If you did not

support me financially, you had nothing to say to me. I made my own money and rocked to the beat of my drum. People constantly tried to warn me about the path I was traveling, but I was doing me, and nobody could tell me how to do me better than me! Life was good. I could go to the mall when I wanted and splurge on designer clothes. I partied almost seven days a week. I ate at great restaurants, and I had guys that would pay me just for my attention. What more could a girl from the hood ask for, right? Wrong! I thought I was living, but I was losing ground fast, merely existing and developing anti-social mindsets along the way. (FYI anti-social, hostile to the well-being of society, aka criminal behavior). I dropped out of high school the first month of my ninth-grade year and started working full-time as a stripper. I didn't have boyfriends. I saw men as objects to be used for as much as you could get out of them.

By the time I got found guilty of this crime and sent to prison, I was lost. The crazy part is, I was mad and somehow felt like I had been done wrong. Never mind that I shot two people! But I was from Mack Avenue, and that's how we got down. I never expected the victims to press charges against me. But they did. It took me less than 15 minutes to commit this crime that I have been paying for 20 years of my life.

I wish I could tell you that after I got sentenced to prison, I had my mind made up to make the necessary changes to become a better person. Nope! I was homesick, mad that I got caught, but I was still stuck in the same patterns. You know the saying: Where you are, there you are? I was constantly getting in trouble because I had a huge issue with people telling me what to do. I had several physical altercations with other inmates, and one was with me possessing a weapon. My custody level was advanced, and now I was a product of my prison environment. At first, I was sad and disappointed in my behavior, but that didn't stop me. I didn't have the luxuries of the free world, but I was out to make the best of my life behind bars. I still smoked weed, popped pills, and dabbled

and doubled around with women to satisfy my sexual urges. It wasn't the free world, but I was doing me!

My time began to become extremely hard. I learned that doing wrong is only fun for a season, and getting high only kept reality off my mind for a short time. It was like I couldn't step a foot out of my cell without getting written up. My custody level was increased again, two times in 6 months but, lucky for me, there was a mix-up in my paperwork, and I was released out of level four-unit and allowed to become a level 2, my actual custody level. And this was a wake-up call for me. I knew I had better figure out how to get my act together; else, my life was going to go down further than it already had. On the surface, it looked as if I was a person who did not give a damn. But I was a lost little girl who didn't know life could be any better.

I slipped into a deep depression. I struggled with an eating disorder and body dysmorphic. I would look in the mirror and see this ugly monster staring back at me. People often complimented me on how pretty I was, but I didn't see it. I felt ugly because I didn't look like the images of women I saw on T.V. and in music videos. I hated myself. Every night I would lay in bed and question God. I had a hard time even believing he existed. I felt like the only thing I had done wrong in life was being born. And I didn't ask for that. I was empty on the inside, and at the time, the only thing that could make that empty feeling go away was dying. I had 20 years left to do in prison, and there was no way I could continue living in the state I was in. Not many people know this about me, but one day I was seriously contemplating suicide. It was like on T.V., the devil on one shoulder, the angel on the other. The devil was whispering, "go ahead and cut your wrists, India. You have nothing to live for!" I sat there trying to figure out how to slice my veins with the razor blade to get it over with as quickly as possible. Then the angel, on the other shoulder, told me not to do it. I'm glad I didn't because on the other side of that day, I realized life had so much purpose in store for me,

even in prison. Suddenly, I was introduced to my "other self." And here are the steps I've learned along the way.

STEP 1: YOU WILL NEED A HIGHER POWER

People always say, "oh, he or she went to prison and got all religious!" If doing your best has landed you in prison, you better get something! I'm not trying to preach or force a choice on you, but my personal choice is Jesus Christ. If you don't have a belief, I would suggest you learn about all the practices out there and find what connects and resonates with you. But for me, learning and following his teaching in scripture has improved my quality of life and given me a set of values that I live by that keep my life in order and peace. My best shot at life got me a 25 – 40-year sentence. So, my choice of a higher power was more out of necessity than anything. And for anybody going to prison, I suggest you find something bigger than yourself to believe in at the start of your sentence.

STEP 2: YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING! NOT EVEN YOURSELF

Now is the time to unlearn every distorted thing you thought life was about. Yup! It's time to let those antiquated street principles that you thought were getting you ahead in life go. I'm sure they are anti-social, unhealthy beliefs that are hurting you and others. If your views have landed you in a county jail cell or prison, it's time to let them go.

STEP 3: GET HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Do some soul searching. What brought you here? Yeah, I know you may not have done anything. You were just there, right? Well, if you were just there, you need to dig deep and figure out what inside of you led to you just being there. There are so many people serving LIFE sentences for just being there. And even though you may not have committed the crime, you should try to figure why you are comfortable being around people who commit crimes?

STEP 4: WATCH THE COMPANY YOU KEEP

I cannot stress this enough. You have to be a drill sergeant about what and who you will allow to be in your personal space. It's impossible to change your life and still keep the

same toxic people around. Our associations influence us more than anything else. You must see your life as a home that contains priceless treasure. So, if you have millions of dollars worth of diamonds and jewelry in your home, would you allow some random shady people to roam around and make themselves comfortable to mishandle and more than likely walk off with your precious treasure? I would hope not! So, it would help if you were the same way about your life. Not everyone deserves or has earned the right to be in your intimate and personal space. What is the requirement for people to have access to you? Who are the people you spend the most time with? Do you look up to them? Are there things in them that you aspire to? Do they inspire you and challenge you to be the best version of yourself? Do they hold you accountable when you are acting beneath your potential? Or do they encourage you to do things that go against who you are? Do they drain you? Talk about you behind your back? Do you trust them to have your best interest in mind?

I'm just saying. It can be a harsh reality check when you size up the people in your immediate circle. Who needs frenemies for the sake of not wanting to be alone? I had to learn this the hard way. Learn how to enjoy your own company until you can be in the company of people who are good to you and good for you. Don't make relationships, either friends or romantically, out of desperation and loneliness and end up compromising who you are and the best version of who you could be.

**PRE-RELEASE:
PREPARING FOR THE PAROLE BOARD
Tammy Holycross #W73051
California Institution for Women**

For lifers, parole board hearings for possible suitability are crucial. Family members play an essential role in this process, too.

The goal for any inmate is to show the parole board what went wrong in his / her life to cause them to make the wrong choices that eventually led to the crime committed. I had to go back into my early childhood to see where my happiness ended. My real dad wanted nothing to do with me; my favorite person, grandpa, died; grandma then died, and my little brother was born. I craved attention. Men gave it to me, sexually, as a child. Resentments grew, substance abuse happened, covering my reality, my codependency, needing to be loved, complete, low self-esteem caused by dysfunctional relationships.

So, I've spent my years of incarceration focused on understanding my past and bettering myself. Each year I've taken anger management and substance abuse self-help classes. I've done volunteer work to give back to society and studied college courses since 2006, earning certificates, degrees.

What helped at my hearing was an awesome board attorney, Laura Sheppard. She recommended documentation, a paper trail of constructive, rehabilitative activities, and I complied. First, start with a timeline of your life, as far back as one can remember, happy times, sad times, traumatic times, crime, substances, self-help, work, etc. Color Code each activity: example – (happiness) Mom was my bluebird leader; 1972 (pink) my dog snoopy died, 1972 (traumatic – yellow) and so on. This allows the commissioners to see traumatic events and substances right before the crime and how the colors have changed to self-help and determination to succeed in the community. The commissioners were impressed. Twelve-step

summaries: how each step relates to your life – show the impact of working the steps on your life; Mental health summary. I documented each professional counseling session I had on topics of my crime and causative factors. Looks good for us to get professional help!

Resume and inquiry letter: I have a passion for working with animals, so I wrote animal shelters and expressed my love and experience. I explained I was a prisoner awaiting the board's evaluation, that I'd be an asset to the company – got two job offers to take to the board.

Relapse prevention: know your triggers, what caused you to turn to drugs. What body cues do you feel when triggered? What will you do when triggered now and in the future? My relapse prevention listed five past triggers and what I'd do if triggered today.

Parole plans: find transitional housing programs in the community that will accept you; its desired ex-lifers do at least six months of adjusting. Write places that appeal to you and know what they offer.

Have a support circle, a timeline for freedom, goals for the day, week, month, six months, year, five years, Get support letters. Show you have friends and family that will support your release and be specific to what they will do. For example, my uncle offered me a room, a cell phone, full use of his truck, computer access, and rides to parole groups, doctors, etc., until I could drive myself. The offer was for several months until I could get on my feet, noting our closeness and the significant change to maturity he's seen in me.

Get inside letters of support from staff that interact with you daily and know you best. Also, ask for letters and evaluations of your character and good deeds. Your goal is to make it as difficult as possible for the parole board to deny you release. Therefore, you must bring powerful evidence of rehabilitation to the meeting.

TEEN VAPING: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

**ROBERT DAVENPORT #2239990
STATE OF TEXAS FERGESON UNIT**

“Dude! Check it out! The new metabolic3 with two free double tanks of Lucky Charms,” Teen One said.

“O.M.G. Must have. For real. Wait till I get paid next week. Gonna get the camo print. Yeah. I be flossin” Teen two replied enthusiastically.

“Ugh. I’m so jealous,” Teen One said with disdain.

That is what vaping has become. It’s ‘badass’. The Mods (apparatus you smoke out of), the tank (attaches to mod which holds juice and coil), and the juices (everything from Lucky Charms to Cinnamon Toast Crunch, to Fruit Pebbles).

If you are trying to appeal to today’s younger generation.... then offering flavors such as Lucky Charms is genius marketing. Genius. I’m a grown man that eats lucky Charms. There is no doubt what flavor I would be vaping if I was a teen.

Full flavor menthol – in the trash.

Lucky Charms, buy one get one half off, please.

The best part is vaping makes you cool.

Not.

Growing up...cool was a fly hat, shiny watch, and a fresh pair of kicks. Times change. These days, having the latest mod is the equivalent of owning the latest Jordan’s or new iPhone. All you need is the metabolic3 (made up btw) mod pack to have within your grasp the upper echelon of coolness.

To teens – smoking will ALWAYS be appealing and cool. Everyone knows it makes you a badass if you smoke. Everyone. You will find that most everyone that smokes wish they had never started. It’s expensive. It’s a crutch. It’s the cause of their morning hacks.

Vaping was found appealing at first because of three things: one – it didn’t stink. Two – the cigarette smoking bans only applied to cigarettes – NOT vaping. Three – they’re cheaper.

What an Ah-ha moment.

Right?

Safer...

Cheaper...

Smells and tastes like Lucky Charms cereal...

And then there was “Popcorn lung,” a direct side effect from smoking the cream and caramel flavored vape juices. People, teens, have died from this – from being safer – from looking cool. It is bad enough with all the respiratory issues and cancer caused from smoking regular cigarettes. Let’s make it taste good so kids will buy it and more will die. I’m being sarcastic if you cannot see thru my thick hazy cloud of vape smoke.

Let me ask you something. Did you know many of the companies selling these amazing vape flavors are loosely regulated? And I’m using loosely, well, loosely. Smaller companies who might or might not sell your favorite vape juice are simply purchasing the ready-made nicotine juice (unflavored), adding whatever it may be to make it taste like a children’s cereal, and then they take it to the specific vape stores that have agreed to sell their loosely regulated juices. The cigarette companies that produce a product with hundreds of harmful chemicals are regulated regularly – and look at the negative aspects at what happens after years of smoking!

WHO KNOWS what is in your favorite vape juice? A small company that makes a few bucks is one thing, but a company cutting their product with their custom ‘or’ proprietary blend is another. They’ll add a ‘little of this or a ‘little of that’ to minimize overhead costs while simultaneously maximizing profits. Cream flavors. They tasted amazing. They also killed people while lining the pockets of their distributors.

“Hold on. What did you say?”

Are you thinking what I’m thinking? Sounds like a drug dealer?

Yeah. I’m willing to bet you have inhaled worse chemicals in your favorite vape than there is in some street drugs. Not to say I promote either because I do not.

The math is simple.

You smoke, you are possibly going to get lung cancer.

You vape, you are possibly going to get who knows what while smelling like Lucky Charms.

I don't know about you, but I'm going to stick with my hats, watches, and shoes.

Vape – no, thank you.

Healthy life? Long-life? Yes, please.

(I would like to give a special thanks to one Tucker Shaw. His vaping knowledge exceeds the study librarians hold with their Dewey Decimal System as a self-proclaimed vape-for-lifer. Outside of the DEATHS I'VE SEEN ON THE NEWS, his insight was vital in the writing of this article).

[LEAVE BOOK REVIEW | My Site 2 \(wixsite.com\)](#)

BEWARE SEXUAL PREDATORS

**Thomas Ford #91457-004
Federal Correctional Facility**

Parents Hold The Key. As a parent, one of the most important things we can do for our children is protect them from society's harm. Yet, even as we guide our kids through the daily journey of life, we may forget that danger lurks where we least expect it and sometimes right under our noses.

As a non-contact sex offender convicted of a cybercrime, I've seen things on the Internet that are disturbing and too easily obtained. Because children are the most vulnerable members of our society, and the Internet most prevalent in their young lives today, I offer you some tips on keeping them safe online and off:

1. Be honest – Children need to know that the Internet is a place that must be navigated cautiously. They must know how to use it properly and to know the risks involved. Ensure they understand that they should never reveal personal information to anyone and limit interaction with people they don't know. Let them know that if they are uncomfortable in any way with a person online or a particular website to let you know immediately.
2. Use Parental Controls – There is software available to limit children's access to the Internet and help you monitor their online activities. These programs are easily found online and are well worth the investment.
3. Avoid peer-to-peer file-sharing software – These sites are notorious for sharing child pornography files and are also dangerous for clandestinely infecting computers with viruses.
4. Limit webcam use – Children, including teenagers, may not realize that everything transmitted by the camera can be and probably is, recorded and shared by people who don't have their best interests at heart. Kids should never appear nude on webcams for any reason.

Although we often think of the Internet as both a blessing and a curse – the latter due to the dubious nature of security issues involved – parents should also never forget that most sex crimes against children are perpetrated by people known to them. For that reason alone, you should have periodic age-appropriate open discussions about personal boundaries and clearly explain the "Good Touch – Bad Touch" paradigm.

Probably one of the most important things you can do to protect your kids in today's world is to help them understand that they can talk to you about anything without fear of judgment or retribution. If you instill in them a sense of trust so that they can approach you about any topic – no matter how taboo – you encourage them not to keep secrets.

Even though these safety tips seem to be common sense to us, kids in their infinite innocence don't have the luxury of commonsense wisdom. That's why it's so important to communicate with them. Often the daily grind of our lives prevents us from finding the time to talk to our children, so it's that much more vital to make the time. You, as a parent, hold the key to keeping your kids safe.

STRIPPED OF PARENTAL RIGHTS

**Gerry Delano Hudson #01560462
Bartlett State Jail**

Five years ago, a mother was caught in the wrong when she stole clothes, perfume, and hygiene products from a store. She stole the clothes and other products to sell on the street, needing diapers, money for public transportation, and food expenses that weren't covered on her food stamp card. She also had a heroin habit but gave up selling drugs, having weighed her options, and concluded that stealing would be a lot less evil than destroying lives with heroin. She then later stated, "If you in need of money and jobs either aren't hiring or fitting the bills, you're left with three options: you can rob someone, you can prostitute, or you can simply steal."

Caught stealing, she was sentenced to five years, one year for each item she stole. She had a four-year-old girl and was pregnant at the time. After finishing a few months in state prison and almost three years in treatment, she felt the punishment was too severe for the crime committed. The time she served wasn't the issue but rather the permanent loss of her parental right to both children. Years of going to court, and she was no closer to getting her children back.

In prison, she wanted to transfer to a unit that would have allowed her to keep her newborn while undergoing treatment, but the prison system denied her that program. Eventually, her family members, who had written her off years before, were awarded custody of both her kids, but still, she was unable to receive parental control.

She has been released from prison and has completed both an associate's and bachelor's degree in behavioral science. She continues to lobby the State Legislature and has spoken at major events on awareness issues while raising her new one-year-old child in an apartment. Yet, despite incredible successes, she remains mired in a maze of state laws designed

to protect children yet lacks the flexibility for parents who have been rehabilitated.

In the instance that parental rights are severed, they become almost impossible to restore. Parents with convictions that are non-aggravated, non-violent crimes are left suffering the consequences for a lifetime, no matter how much they end up changing for the better. It's just difficult to conceive that sober-minded and educated women are not allowed to get their children back.

I lost my son behind a non-violent crime. To date, I still fight for his return and hope that one-day things will change. As a former criminal and immigration attorney, these were areas I never had to address. Once I lost my right to practice due to continuing practice without a valid bar number, I lost everything when I lost my son and the woman I was supposed to marry over something so simple. I have been denied parole many times as a risk and danger to the public when clearly my record shows a non-violent history. I hold more academic university degrees than most of the staff and administration within the prison system.

Thousands of women and men with criminal convictions risk losing parental rights each year due to a combination of state and federal laws intended to protect children and speed up the adoption process. This risk affects all women but tends to target Hispanic and Black women disproportionately. According to Columbia law school's Philip Gentry, a leading authority on incarcerated parents, "It is a rare situation where a woman prisoner with a child in foster care has not faced this issue." Experts say there is an urgent need to review these laws to increase flexibility and shed the skin of the "one size fits all" approach.

On June 24, 2015, the Board of Pardons and Paroles approved the modification of the approval-denial reasons provided by a parole panel when rendering a parole decision. These changes offer a clear and concise explanation for the approval-denial of parole and reduce the ambiguity that exists with specific approval-denial reasons. Implementation and use

of this new system will be forthcoming once the applicable computer programming changes are complete. The thing here is, where is it stated that laws will be reviewed or even considered in authorizing incarcerated parents' parental rights? The point is, it doesn't, and the state of Texas isn't the only criminal justice system that ignores this. It's being seen all over the U. S.

The government has long been plagued with this crisis. As a child, the foster care system I went through has been an imperfect backup for struggling parents, particularly for women who are more likely to be sole parents than men. Based on my research, in the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of children were languishing in state foster care systems across the country, while potential adoptive parents grew impatient at long waits. In 1997, the year I entered high school, Congress passed the ASFA Act (Adoption and Safe Families Act) with the primary goal of speeding up the adoption process for potential foster parents. The new law has strict time limits on how long a child can stay in a foster home before the state terminated a parent's rights to make a child available for adoption. This process is understandable if you are dealing with an animal or pet, but children? On the market? This sounds like legal human trafficking and human trade. The law further states that if a child is in foster care for fifteen of twenty-two months, the state can legally end the biological parent's parental rights (s) or face the loss of generous federal funding for their programs. This law also requires parents to show an intention to reunify their children to avoid losing parental rights. The thing is, if this is a case like mine where I acquired a 10-year prison sentence for non-violent crimes, I am at the mercy of the parole board to decide not only if I will be eligible for parole but also if I will ever get the chance to have parental rights of my child. If a prison term exceeds the law's 22 months, prisoners lose their parental rights automatically. That, to me, sounds a lot like double jeopardy. We are punished for non-violent crimes twice. This Act has unintended consequences for incarcerated parents who

find it impossible to satisfy the Act's definition of "reunification," which focuses on demonstrating continued contact with their children.

In a nutshell, take it from a victim and a legal specialist. This epidemic, where incarcerated parents lose custody of their children for committing minor, non-violent offenses, is a human rights issue because parenthood is an inalienable right. Not all parents are competent, and some deserve to be incarcerated, but the mainline problem in the United States is that the combination of mass incarceration and inflexible foster care laws lead to an extraordinary, disproportionate punishment that overwhelmingly affects the poor and minority communities. (A single mother is a minority whether White, Black, Asian, Indian, Arab). This point is a form of punishment because they are forcibly separated from their children and precluded from participating in family life in a meaningful way.

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Poets Speak

Part 4.

The beauty of writing poetry is that it can come to you anywhere. Even in prison, one can find inspiration to write poetry. For some, it is a healthy way to cope with hardship. It can be cathartic, opening doors to sometimes suppressed feelings, weighing on one's mind and heart. Poetry educates using rhythm, stringing words together with a beat, creating rap lyrics, sharing your story.

Stilettos

Previously Incarcerated Contributor

I'll tell you a little secret if you promise not to squeal; It only happens in my mind; it's not a public appeal!

As you know, I'm not free to do the things I love; but in my mind, there's no restriction, no permission needed from above!

I choose my fancy here; it's here I strut and stride; it's where I wear my "lady Vic's." it's here where I'm not shy.

I have a pair of red shoes and stilettos are their name; And in my mind, I slide them on and play my lady games.

My bra and panties match (Victoria, my secret pal), and with those red, red, high-heeled shoes, I'm quite the sexy gal.

There are things I cannot have right now; there are people I cannot see, there are rules and regulations but, in my mind, I'm always free!

FRO PRO

Sandra Brown #R35900
Lincoln Correctional Center

Just the other day, just the other day—
I'm struttin' all stately
Innately
In my glory when
Some m-a-n
No taller than my chin
Came at my 'fro.
--True story—
“Hey!” He croaked
As if to provoke
My undivided in vain.
Attention unspoken,
Intention unspoken
As what's understood
Need not be explained.
“Hey!” Nonexistent”
On birth certificate
Under Name—
“Hey!” nowhere
Under picture ID
Clipped on collar
Of state-issued
Outermost garment.
Therefore—
Absent contemplation
In this Concrete Plantation
To Purpose and Destination
I proceeded,
While he, determined,
Impeded my quest.
“Hey you!”

I turned around
At the voice
More spellbound is
sound
This time around.
Out of line
Pulled he me
Determined to see
This modes goddess
Donning this
Magnanimous
Cold black crown.
From quick roots grow
With thick long flow
My pick strong 'fro
Like power on steroids.
Got you mad paranoid...
Or maybe just plain mad.
Mad that short soup bowl
Porcelain dome dons
Remnants of a mane
So sad
Long gone like a passing
fad.
Full 'fro Ebony
Standing tall and free
And you know like
Queen Bee
It's the best thing
You never had.

Au Natural incarnate
Sparks statewide hate
To put Blac locs
On lockdown.
No haircare
For Black heads
And blue suits
Make us cut dreads
In the name of alleged
security
In IDOC
Hate policy
Moves to cease
And desist my regimen.
This attack
On Black hair
Thick in air
Like tension
In Ferguson
Boston
Charleston
Damn
Talk about putting the
noose
To the root—
Hands up don't shoot
Or leave us hanging
Like Sandra Bland.
R.I.P. Kindra Chapman
Dead at eighteen

Dangling in Dixieland
Like her sister
The day before.
Maybe we missed the memo.
But newsflash,
Sistahs get it, too.
Today my hair,
Tonight my rights,
Tomorrow my skin,
Any minute my life.

So, If
#BLACKLIVESMATTER
Then
#BLACKLIFEMATTERS
Then
#BLACKWOMENMATTER.
So
#WHATABOUTUS?

Fed Up

Miranda Phillips #7386001

Fed up with all this prison drama, Missing My Momma
My life is a period without the comma.
Fed up with the changes of peoples attitude
don't do no good to be polite so I stay being rude.
Fed up with this bullshit, trying to maintain
gotta stay on cloud nine, not to go insane.
Fed up with those 'hoes dropping salt on my name
when I go to 'hoe check they point fingers at each other for the
blame.
Fed up with all these haters, hating on me
Can't' stand a real woman, let me be.
Fed up with a bad situation I don't think you understand,
I'm Fed Up. I'm Fed Up. I'm doing the best I can.

Hustlers

Hustlers on the block, selling the rocks, making a dope's
fiend's dream come true
But never thinking it would be you.
Hustlers go hard trying to make a mil,
but once they get popped, then comes a deal.

Love

Love is a gamble, Love is a game
The boys do the sexing, The girls get the blame.

One week of passion, nine months of pain
three days in the hospital, and a baby to name.

I DIDN'T KNOW

A.K.A. Carrisa #6300786

I did not know what he had in the trunk
But when I found out I thought that I would pass out
We're riding on interstate ten
It's pouring down rain
As we turned off the car did a spin
Patrol cars are on our tailgate; there is a roadblock now it's too late
We were pulled over by cops
When they searched the trunk I prayed that my heart string would not pop
I couldn't stand the sight
I had to drop my head
What I saw was his wife and little baby dead
The cops looked at me with a questioning look
I said I didn't know that I was riding with a crook
Fred confessed to the police that he killed them both
And I had nothing to do with it
I didn't even know
Fred is now on death row
I was never charged because I Didn't Know

Prison Faces

Anywhere from eighteen to eighty years old
Prisons don't discriminate; it's vicious and cold
They come in wheelchairs, using canes and walkers
Loud mouth fools, and big money talkers
The blind, cripples and the crazy
The hardworking and lazy
One arm, no arms without shoes or shoelaces

Those are just some of the prison faces
Mother and father, doctors, nurses, and lawyers
Some of the people committed no crime at all
In several cases whole families took a fall
Now they're all locked up because chino wanted to ball
And that's certainly not right they were charged with
conspiracy and sentenced to life
These are just some things that take place when you look into
a prison face.

Capitol Murder

Blood everywhere as I went down the stairs
The room looked dark and gloomy
Something like a scary movie
An arm there and a leg still in the chair
A foul odor in the air in the bedroom we used to share
What I seen was so unfair my husbands' naked body sitting in
a chair
A woman dressed as a whore kneeled down on the floor
I guess she was sucking his dick
When she got her wig split
Now I'm vomiting because I'm sick
This had to be a hit
They killed my husband and that Bitch
That's something that will completely disturb you
Being a witness to a Capitol Murder

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Politics

5. Politics

Ever wonder what prisoners think about the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol or Donald Trump's refusal to concede after losing the 2020 election? Can you imagine a group of prisoners discussing American foreign policy or President Biden's use of the "budget reconciliation" process to get legislation passed? These are the kind of topics many of them discuss and write about with great passion. In this section, you will learn how politically astute they are.

HAIL TRUMP!

LeMont Medlin #0638441
Franklin Correctional Center

Like many Americans, I sat in shock as I watched Trump win the presidential election. But not for the reasons you might think. When he won the Republican nomination, I smiled, for in his nomination was proof that 21st century America had not truly evolved beyond its historical shortcomings. I knew it!

All my life, I had been sold the narrative that America was far removed from its treacherous past. From grade school to adulthood, I'd been told of the injustices and inhumanities that were once widespread but no longer existed thanks to the civil rights movement. From my parents, teachers, and elders, I'd heard about the acts of classism, racism, and sexism they were forced to endure; and how for the most part, these travesties were no longer acceptable in American culture. But in the back of my mind, I had doubts about the accuracy of these claims.

Enter Donald Trump! The perfect degenerative fool and debased soul represented the best mix of the worst

characteristics known to man. Thus, he was the ideal candidate to not only lure out America's most prejudiced souls but also finally help me resolve a lifelong suspicion?? Is the century I live in truly less morally debased than the last?

The first Trump rally made it clear that the candidate wouldn't win this presidential race with the best solutions and experience. So instead, this election would be (and was) decided by what's known as white identity politics.

By that, I mean classism, racism, and sexism. I won't pretend that I knew all along what Trump was doing. But in my gut, I sensed the fix was in. How else can one explain how a womanizing, racist, adulterous scoundrel can spew insults upon everyone from military veterans, women, a presiding court Judge, and still win the presidency in a landslide? I'll repeat it... look at the footage from Trump's first rallies.

The most cowardly and deplorable of humankind filled Trump's rallies. Fueled and empowered by Trump's hate rhetoric, these detestable souls violently lashed out against anyone or anything that opposed their idol. And being the diabolical pied piper that he is, Trump inspired these haters to hit the polls and vote according to their own specific bias(es). And they did.

Like any other wealthy businessman, Trump studied the demographics of his most avid supporters, then spent his entire campaign appealing to their three main biases ... Racism, Sexism, and Classism. And this is how Trump, without any political experience or a legitimate platform, managed to Kansas-City Shuffle (a most clever deception that requires thought on the part of the deceiver and great ignorance on the part of the deceived) his way into the White House.

I'm no Sun-Tzu, (neither is Trump), but even I know that there is no way to eradicate individual prejudices. (A fact no doubt brought to Trump's attention by someone from his team of strategists).

I watched Trump spend his entire campaign imploring every racist in America to help him eradicate every aspect of

Obama's presidency. He galvanized every sexist with his poorly hidden belief that women are unfit to be the commander in chief and reassuring his affluent fellow elite that he would address their common interests. And these are the specific white identity politics Trump exploited to win the White House.

The morning after the election, a bittersweet "I knew it" smirk formed on my lips as the answer to my age-old question proved what I had long suspected. That classism, racism, and sexism weren't extinct or dying but were, in fact, alive and healthy. Thanks to Trump, the worst of humankind (behind the confines of a ballot box) felt emboldened enough to show the world what was truly in their hearts.

Thanks to Trump, I now know exactly how wide the color divide remains between minorities and whites. Thanks to Trump, I now know that approximately two-thirds of non-college-educated white males (double talk for 'bama's rednecks and hillbillies) still hold the same social views as those held by their 19th-century counterparts.

For me, nothing else Trump does from here on out will be as profoundly impactful as him showing and proving that his hate-filled sexist and racists rhetoric wasn't just unique to him but also shared by more white Americans for my comfort.

Despite much disdain for Trump, I'm truly thankful to him for showing me and my fellow minorities the true feeling and face of this country.

THE DONALD AMERICA

Released – Previously Incarcerated Contributor

“It’s Time to Make America Great Again.” That’s the message GOP front-runner, and real estate mogul Donald Trump has been selling the masses, and the message seems to be resonating with voters. His arena-style rallies have brought forth record numbers, and their continuing support has been unwavering despite how outrageous his demeanor becomes.

What does it mean to make America great again? For some, it’s an image of strong world leadership; for others, it’s a return to the imagined fiscal prosperity of yesteryear. To many, it’s simply the great American pipe dream, and who in America doesn’t dream about being part of something great? It’s ingrained in our blood and heritage. But there comes a time when we must come down from the clouds and face reality.

I recently spoke with several Trump supporters here in prison and listened to what they had to say. They all share the same beliefs. “I like the way he speaks his mind and stands up to his opponents,” said one man. “He’s a very successful businessman and knows how to get the job done,” said another. Yet the most important quality Trump possesses, according to the men I spoke with, is that he’s not part of the Washington establishment. That fact, coupled with his aggressive, no-apology attitude, has awakened something in America that won’t easily be dismissed.

Folks are fed up with career politicians. When President Barack Obama took office, we believed we were heading into an era of hope and change. Sadly, things turned out much differently. Perhaps the bar of expectation was set too high. The great recession he inherited left millions of Americans feeling angry and dissatisfied with the direction their lives had taken, and partisan politics turned exceedingly hostile. It became the personal goal of the Republican Party to make

Obama fail as a president, no matter the cost. Our new leader faced a division that soon overshadowed any message of hope and change he wished to champion.

Now, the political landscape in America has shifted even further and has become so polarized that reconciliation is all but impossible. We've entered a time when we choose the lesser of two evils with little compromise. The two-party system is broken. Donald Trump quickly discovered a way to tap into this emotional chaos, the anger and fear that gathers above our heads like a dark cloud, and he used it to further his ambitious agenda. How far can he travel on such negative fuel? Perhaps, all the way to the White House?

As frightening as that thought may seem, divisive politics have proven to work in recent years. Just look right here in Wisconsin at Republican Governor Scott Walker's "Election-Protest-Recall-Further Protest-Re-election" cycle over the last six years. Despite civil unrest within the state and the constant cloud of suspicion involving campaign finance fraud, a John Doe investigation, and indictments against Scott Walker aides, resulting in convictions, the Governor continues to drum up the necessary support to remain in office; he even made an early bid for the presidency last year. We all need to ask ourselves whether divisive politics will secure the nomination and presidency for Donald Trump? It looks more and more likely that he will win the Republican primary.

If Donald Trump becomes the GOP nominee, he will have a treacherous path to navigate if he wishes to win the highest office in the land. In a national election, polarization won't help his cause. Trump has chosen to play off America's anger and fear, coming across as a tough, no holds barred conservative, full of vicious rhetoric, a vastly different message than the hope and change Obama ran on in 2007. But can Trump sell his message of belligerent egotism to politically conscientious Independents? Will his hate-filled nationalist views win over the minds of men and women who vote with calm intellect instead of raw emotion?

It will be a challenging task to accomplish. But, history stands upon a precipice, and this fall's election will prove to be a watershed moment for the entire GOP. Perhaps they will be forced to wake up from their pipe dreams and face reality. Suppose the Republican Party can't find a way to connect with the numerous sub-demographics that have emerged over the past decades. In that case, they're in peril of extinction as a political party.

While Terrorism appears to be the hot topic of the moment, it's a fear we've lived with since September 11, 2001. The issues that will determine the outcome of this election are Economic Equality, Civil Liberties, Immigration, Religious Tolerance, Gun Control, and Police Misconduct. Women's Rights groups, Black Lives Matter, LGBT communities, and the Hispanic youth have helped to push the Republicans base firmly into the minority. The last GOP candidate that went on to win the presidency – George W. Bush - did so by a mere fraction of the vote in a single state, and Florida has since gone to the Democrats. What have the Republicans done over the last fifteen years to improve their chances?

Donald Trump's hardline politics will only prove to divide America even further. His hateful attitude towards Mexico, Islam, and women, in general, won't win him any favors. It's hard to conceive, but it's as if he believes he can succeed with such overt discrimination. Even the other Republican hopefuls recoiled when he proposed to ban an entire religious group from entering the country, a clear violation of the U.S. Constitution.

Yet, that hasn't appeared to diminish the growing element of unrest in America that hates politics as usual. Indeed, it has fanned the flames that threaten to burn down the entire Washington establishment. If Trump's continuing storm of rage and malcontent works to draw voters to the polls, as it has to his rallies, and the Democrats fail to arouse equal fervor then, as unlikely as it may seem, we all might wake up and find ourselves in a real dark place this November 8, 2016 – the Donald America.

EX-CONVICTS: EXERCISE YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE

**Josh Shadduck #332317
Fox Lake Correctional**

"Look, I gotta go with Hillary. I like Bernie Sanders, but he's too weak. Trump will eat him alive." "Hillary? Are you serious? The last thing we need in the White House is another Clinton." "Democrats and Republicans... they're all the same. I'd rather vote for an Independent, maybe even Bloomberg."

You may find it amazing how well-informed and diverse the opinions of convicts behind bars can be, but it should hardly be surprising. Consider that the decisions being made in government, either on a state or federal level, affect nearly every aspect of these individuals' lives. From the quality of the food they eat and their clothing to the treatment programs and education they receive, everything's dictated by government and politics. It could be argued that the average prisoner in the U.S. has more invested in the outcome of an election than most free citizens. It's not just liberty and lifestyle at stake, but it could mean life and death in many cases.

Let's suppose all the prisoners across America had the right to vote. What impact would it make in a general election? Is the idea such a frightening proposition? For some, it very well may be. We're talking about a demographic of over 2 million free-thinking individuals.

Prisoners aren't ignorant of the issues facing our country either. They have families and loved ones out there being affected by the policies of Washington as well. It's not all that unusual to witness a group of men hanging out on the rec. yard or eating dinner in the chow hall discussing world events, the results of a recent primary, or debating the ramifications of a newly appointed justice and how that appointment will affect the state and federal laws in the years to come. It may or may not surprise you to discover prisoners both for and against concealed-carry laws, fiscal conservatism vs. government

assistance programs, and strong opinions concerning immigration on all sides of the spectrum.

Convicts, generally, spend more time watching the news, following debates, reading magazines and newspapers, and studying legal decisions that originate in the judicial branch of the government than anything else they do. The average individual behind bars has more than just a peripheral understanding of the issues at hand. So how would such voters influence the outcome of an election? That's a question that deserves closer scrutiny.

"Most of the violent criminals in America are Democrats." That's what one of the Republican candidates running for president said last year. He was immediately criticized by the rest of the Republican hopefuls, each disputing the wild claim, assuring there was no evidence to support it. Yet, if this thought was examined a bit deeper, it might be discovered to hold a bit of truth. Of course, the intent of such a statement by the Republican candidate was to vilify the Democrats and paint them as a party of violent criminals in some sense. But, mostly, violent crime is more symptomatic of today's economic reality rather than a cause of some political affiliation or agenda, as some would like the world to assume.

The idea that it's mostly Democrats out committing violent crimes is preposterous. If you questioned the men and women arrested for these crimes, they probably couldn't tell you much about the Democrat or Republican parties one way or another. However, if you spoke to these same individuals a few years later, you would probably learn that they now share a common cause with the Democratic agenda; at least, it appears that way on the surface.

Just look toward the motives behind most violent crimes like armed robbery or even murder in many cases. They can often be linked back to an economic influence, usually involving drug addiction, an aspect the government has chosen to criminalize rather than treat over the past four decades. Other violent crimes, some would even argue the "worse" sort of violent crimes such as mass shootings or terrorist

bombings, are generally perpetrated by the mentally ill or those ideologues who champion a more conservative cause. Look at Eric Rudolph, who bombed the 1996 World Olympics and several abortion clinics in Atlanta, Georgia, or Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols and the bombing of the Oklahoma City building. I'll leave it up to society to determine the motive behind such heinous acts, but it's important to understand the political agenda and general mindset of those who commit such crimes.

Getting back to the idea that most prisoners identify themselves with the Democratic view, it's not that difficult to see the Republican agenda threatens the men and women incarcerated all over America. The Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin shows that most prisoners in America are either poor or belong to a minority group. How would one expect these men and women to feel about laws and policies that constantly oppose projects such as public assistance for the poor, increased minimum wage, or voting rights? What about when a Republican candidate demonizes the family and friends of these men and women who live across the border or belong to a different religious group? It's clear to see if you pay attention to what's going on in our cities, enacting legislation that all but guarantees millions of firearms end up in these unfortunate communities directly affects the health and well-being of these citizens. Without easy access to these guns, many violent crimes in question wouldn't have even taken place.

So, does that mean the Democratic Party is the answer? Their motives may appear noble, but their actions often prove more subtle and devious than the overt discriminatory policies of the Republican Party, and the results are no less harmful to the prisoners of America. These politicians curry favor from the poor every election cycle, calling on the families of convicts, claiming to represent the working class, seeking equality and justice. But, when it comes down to it, the Democrats fall far from the mark.

We must not forget that the prison population in America doubled under Bill Clinton's Administration. We went from

770,000 prisoners in 1990 to 1.4 million in 2000 when he left office. Even under Republican President Ronald Reagan and his "war on drugs," we only had a prison population of just 330,000.

To give President Clinton a bit of credit, however, both the House of Representatives and the Senate were controlled by the Republican Party at the time. Still, the president signed into law two bills that proved devastating to the incarcerated: the Prison Litigation Reform Act and the Anti-Terrorist and Affective Death Penalty Act. One bill made it difficult, if not impossible, for an indigent prisoner to pursue a meaningful appeal in the higher courts following their conviction. The other bill placed outrageous restrictions and financial burdens on individuals attempting to litigate abuse and corruption inside prisons. The effects of these two bills are finally coming to light now that prison reform has become a national topic.

It may be true that the Democratic Party claims to champion causes that coincide with prisoner interests, but if convicts really could vote in elections, there's a chance we could see a true revolution in politics, one that even a Social Democrat like Bennie Sanders would be amazed to see.

Another political party views America's mass incarceration and corporate greed as something that needs to be eradicated. They also believe in fiscal conservatism and financial policies that the Republicans can get behind.

Please take a good look at the Libertarian Party and all they work to accomplish. How terrible would it be to tear down half of the prisons in the United States and replace them with universities and drug treatment centers? What if we stop warehousing prisoners like cattle and start placing them in comprehensive community service programs instead? Teach them skills and responsibility as they work to make amends for their misdeeds? If all the prisoners in America could vote, there's a good chance the Libertarians would pick up a lot more seats in Congress and may even have a real shot at the White House itself. Could the political party that genuinely cherishes civil rights and personal liberties see a boost in

popularity from the 2 million possible votes prisoners represent? Could it even be enough to break the two-party system for good? Unfortunately, those questions will have to be left up for speculation.

It remains to be seen how America will shape up over the subsequent several presidential cycles now that the prison reform and drug treatment have become issues we can no longer ignore. If only the prisoners who are fortunate enough to have their voting rights reinstated remember what was important to them, then the face of America may change after all. But for now, Washington will continue to play its game, and America's prisoners will continue to be the politicians' voiceless pawns in a never-ending scheme for power.

THE PRESIDENT SAID, "DON'T BOO. VOTE"

**Charles Mamou #999333
State of Texas Polunsky Unit**

I gotta tell ya: This is the whackiest Presidential Election season ever. Sure, politics are always heavily flavored with lies, low-blow verbal jabs, and political pork rhetoric that gives us high blood pressure. But this year... this year has taken it up another notch, in a different direction that is comical, divisive, and dangerous. I mean, the things Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton have said are nationally and internationally embarrassing, more entertaining than any reality T.V. show could ever script. Trump versus Clinton makes Kayne West look normal and nerdish, even likable.

Bernie Sanders said it best when he declared defiantly, "I'm tired of hearing about Hillary and those damn e-mails!"

Me too! But how can the e-mailgate go away when Hillary keeps making gaffes like, "Well, I kinda short-circuited on that one, Huh?" I mean, what is Hillary Clinton? The next new wave of SIRI voice animated robots that speak in a mechanical monologue to explain away things that can be explained with a simple admission of wrongdoing. Is her pride that arrogant that she can't admit when she's wrong? No wonder Republican chants of "Lock her up" resonate.

Then there's The Donald, who seems stuck-on-stupid about 'Mexicans' being the only immigrants in America who rape and sell drugs. Never mind the fact that his wives are immigrants (guess he isn't a supporter of Made In The USA, as he claims he is), or that all of America's citizens are people of Immigration. Of course, billionaires can say what they want, so when he said, "I could kill someone and get away with it," I believe him. He wants to make the U.S. military GREAT again but criticize fallen soldiers who have lost their lives in battle. 'Cause to The Donald, only great soldiers live and avoid being captured. However, he and I do share something in common. I agree with The Donald that all babies

should be quiet when I (and Donald Trump) are talking. Babies and their parents should be escorted out of the building. I'm fascinated with the sound of my voice, just like Donald Trump.

The media has painted the choice for the 2016 presidency as the Crook versus the Narcissus. Hillary will rob Peter and Paul to pay herself. While Trump would instigate World War 3, annihilating everyone except him and Mexican immigrants needed for labor. It's like choosing between two diseases from which you must suffer, and it is mandatory. Neither is a good choice for rational or anyone thinking sanely? But one of them will be elected the next President of...America. And before you BOO these choices, recall what President Obama said during his DNC speech: "Don't Boo. Vote!"

CON MAN OR REAL DEAL?

**Thomas Ford #91457-004
Federal Correctional Facility**

Donald Trump has captivated millions of people. All year long, he has been saying things that voters like to hear, and whenever he says something wholly foolish or erroneous, the following day, he changes the story or says he never said that, or the media got it all wrong. Besides being a pathological liar, who is Trump?

At the beginning of this year, Trump said a lot, and people blindly flocked to his rallies, but more Americans started to question his authenticity as he said more. Many influential people, including governors and senators, believe that Donald Trump is nothing more than a con artist. Said Michael Bloomberg recently, "God help us" if the Republican nominee runs the U.S. government like he runs his business empire." Bloomberg went on to add, "I'm a New Yorker, and I know a con when I see one. Trump is a risky, reckless, and radical choice, and we can't afford to make that choice."

But besides personal anecdotes by Bloomberg, how has Trump fared as a businessman? Throughout his career, Trump has boasted about being a billionaire and built golf courses, hotels, and condominiums. But a closer look at his businesses reveals that he has left a long legacy of bankruptcies, thousands of litigations, unpaid contractors and laborers, angry shareholders, and disheartened customers. The truth is that many people feel Trump ripped them off.

Bloomberg and many others believe that Trump is just flaunting his hypocrisy, meaning that the guy brags about "Made in America" and bringing back jobs but uses cheap labor in third-world countries to manufacture his line of products.

Trump has no original policies. He spends half the day on Twitter critiquing President Obama and Hilary Clinton and the rest of the time making ridiculous statements on whatever

comes to his mind. On Twitter, he spends the day blaming Mexicans for taking American jobs, Muslims for being terrorists, and African Americans for all the crime in America. He has no original plans for the country. His two major election promises are that he will deport 11 million illegals from the country and build a 4,000-mile wall. Magically, this is somehow going to create jobs for all of America. What he forgets is that the "illegals" are only doing jobs that Americans do not want, and deporting 11 million will not only take time but cost billions. He full well knows that Mexico is not going to subsidize this. He is unaware that he must get approval from Congress first. Presidents in the USA do not make solo decisions on most things. It appears that Trump does not understand the basics of running a democratic country.

On Good Morning America, August of 2016, Marco Rubio called Trump a con artist who has made a career of screwing working Americans. He went on to mention the multiple bankruptcies and Trump's University, which is now under litigation. Most Americans now think that Trump is deceptive and untrustworthy. He is impulsive and threatens war with any country that opposes his views. While most politicians tend to fib a lot, with Trump, it is routine. There are countless cases where he has said things and then blamed someone else or the media for misinterpretation.

Trump has made a lot of promises to his supporters, but most border on unrealism. There is a general sentiment in the country that Trump does not even believe what he says - he is simply an opportunist, using politics to move on to the next thing in his life. He has drifted from one thing to another all his life, leaving a trail of unhappiness, failed schemes, unpaid contractors, bankruptcies, and failures. He keeps on mentioning that he will build a wall across the U.S. and Mexican border but back in the 1980s he was charged for using illegal immigrants in the demolition of Bonwit Teller building and construction of Trump Tower. This disconnect clearly shows that he is just using politics to bolster his position and use flattery to attract "illegals" to work for him.

The problem with America is that Trump is telling people what they want to hear, right or wrong. He is a charlatan that is selling snake oil without any merit. He sells illusions of grandeur with no reality whatsoever. He promises the masses that tomorrow will be better, and that is how everyone gets through in life. Trump has used emotions to mislead and deceive people all his life, caring little of what words he uses as long he gets what he wants.

So far, no one knows what is going on inside Trump's brain and what his true intentions are. The best evidence about Trump's deceit comes from his defunct educational venture, Trump University. That lawsuit alleges that Trump used deception, concealment, and false promises to defraud the enrolled students.

The tragic thing is that Trump's supporters view him as honest and genuine and have dismissed all other candidates. The chief reason why Trump is seen as a hero to some is because in this election, he faces another candidate with an ill reputation. Unfortunately, Hilary Clinton has not helped matters at all. Time after time, the past has caught up with her and her lies. Hilary's checkered past goes back many decades. In addition, she has a philandering husband. She is prone to misstate the truth when it serves her purpose. There is her ill-advised use of a home computer to transmit government documents and her "bogus" Clinton foundation. But between the two evils, she is responsible, educated, and has years of experience. Donald Trump has ZERO experience in the government, and his track record in business is mediocre at best.

Whether Trump or Clinton wins the election is a matter only of academic importance; the one thing is for sure, Americans will be royally screwed for the next four years, or worse, eight years.

WHO'S GOING TO WIN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION – 2016

**Charles Mamou #999333
State of Texas Polunsky Unit**

In 2016 the media called these change agent supporters 'Bernie Bros' or 'Bernie or Bust' supporters, the type of grassroots revolutionaries that bring about change with their numbers, voices, and passion. They are a coveted group for any politician trying to win political office at any level. But are they new? Of course not. These younger, more educated, way-left aggressive liberals were always around and turned out in a tsunamic wave that helped propel then-Senator Barack Obama into the Oval. In 2008, President Obama had 69,498,516 votes. In 2012, he had 65,915,796 votes for his reelection bid. Both were all-time highs for an elected President, and he needed every vote because conservative voters were not comfortable having an inexperienced black man as President. He bragged about his Kenyan heritage and dared to sing an Al Green R&B love song to the First Lady, who was the first Black First Lady, and professed to enjoy waking up in the White House knowing that it's a mansion slaves built.

I believe that conservative political leaders wanted a Democrat to win after the George W. Bush regime so that the following failures of a Democrat would cover up the failures that their previous Republican President had created with his genocidal wars in Iraq that nearly brought America to repeat The Great Depression. Instead, the inexperienced President-elect gambled on helping the same banks that aided the near disaster and instability of the 2008 recession. He even helped the auto industry that helped keep many workers employed.

Previous Presidents could not capture or kill the Al Qaeda terrorist leader, Osama bin Laden, but President Obama did. Previous attempts to implement universal health care failed, but President Obama managed to create and get passed what

haters have coined Obama Care. President Obama's accomplishments under the near ruination he faced once he took office are admirable. Only an Obama hater would argue differently. So, the Obama babes that two terms later morphed into Bernie-Bros had it right, eh?

One could then assume that the next President of the U. S. would be a no-brainer, President Hillary Clinton? She fell from the Obama's administration tree. She was his secretary of state, a position he offered her after all the insults she and her partner-in-crime, Bill Clinton, threw his way when seeking the Democratic nomination.

Not so fast.

Currently, Clinton has a four-to-five-point lead in the national mock polls (which means nothing to me, as the voters polled are selected from a registry that doesn't even make up 1% of all actual voters). A recent survey interviewed voters in Pennsylvania, both democrats, and republicans, agreeing to cast their ballot choice for Donald Trump, making this once loyal blue state an unfaithful red for the first time in nearly thirty years. Men and women voters' reasoning for not liking Hillary: simple, she's a woman.

Sure, the excuse for not voting for Hillary seems idiotic and sexist, but aren't we Americans? Don't we preach sexism, racism, classism, segregation, as well as bigotry to our young? It's in our music, our movies, our daily media, and its exaggerated reporting. These 'isms' are entrenched in our daily American fabric, so it does not surprise me to hear that Hillary is being shunned because she's a woman.

Donald Trump has done everything in his dogmatic power and personality to offend everyone globally, including throwing verbal insults toward members of his Republican party. He has that 'do-it-himself-dismiss-everyone-else-Caesar' mentality. That alone should make everyone pause about making him 'king' of Pennsylvania Avenue. Still, millions of voters embrace Donald.

Hillary should be beating Trump by a double-digit spread (having a twenty-point lead or more) given Trump's alienating

comments. He has broken all five of the Politician Commandments:

Thou shalt not express true feelings about the poor and minorities.

Thou shall not piss off the media.

Thou shall not give disingenuous apologies while having a weak, blinking eye on the camera.

Thou shall not encourage constituents to punch opposing protestors or take up arms if they aren't elected.

And Thou shall not joke about using nuclear weapons.

Donald Trump is an unrepentant political sinner who believes he is a one-hundred-thousand-pound gorilla who enters a restaurant and sits anywhere he so damn pleases. Don't believe me? Then why are we even talking about the possibility that Donald Trump can still become the next President of the United States?

Of course, The Minority Report that fields questions from African Americans, Latinos, Asians, etc., seems to be turned off by Donald Trump. However, they are not so eagerly turned on with Hillary Clinton, either. Why? When minorities, African Americans in particular, give her the head-to-toe exam, they are reminded she once called young black men super predators, that her husband's backdoor bipartisan dealings lead to mass incarceration of minorities, and his Anti-Terrorist Act bill led to poor and uneducated minorities ending up on death row in disproportionate numbers. Many on death row have been exonerated and freed, but, sadly, many innocent men likely died. The law is licentious and irreversible when mistakes occur against the wrongly accused.

Yeah, African Americans have the memory of elephants: they don't forget, and they don't forgive for so many others.

So, who's going to win? Damn if I know. I'm not a part of the once famous Dionne Warwick's psychic hotline, and I don't invest my beliefs in the content of Chinese cookies. But I will tell you this. If Hillary Clinton cannot get 90% of the Obama-babes/Bernie Bros., if African Americans don't turn out in mass numbers the way they did for Obama, which I

predict they won't, then she won't have enough votes to beat Trump. See, we know Donald Trump has said some racist and bigoted things and is entirely unapologetic about what he says. Still, his supporters love his passion to "take their country" back. That type of loyalty should keep Hillary and her camp up at night.

On November 9, 2016, the day after the election, if we hear of an out-of-shape old man with a bad toupee, at the top of Trump Towers wearing a white ancient Roman robe, yelling into a bullhorn, demanding his subjects kneel and praise their new emperor, please know that Hillary Clinton didn't have an emergency transgender operation to impersonate a male to get votes from those refusing to vote for a woman. Instead, we will have to endure four years of listening to Trump tell us all just how amazing and smart he is and that he does indeed have big hands.

WOMEN VOTERS FOR TRUMP

Released - Previously Incarcerated Contributor

Most people are outraged by the 2005 video showing Trump being crude and vulgar about women. Well, looking back at this presidential candidate, Trump has been lewd, vulgar, and objectifying women for decades. The list of women who have come under the sexist wrath of Trump is too long even to list here. We knew of Trump's atrocious behavior towards women as far back as the 1990s. Early in the year, he belittled his former wife, Ivana, saying he would never buy decent pictures or jewelry. They were going through a turbulent divorce at that time, but Trump was beginning his tirades against women.

In 1991, speaking to Esquire magazine, he stated that it did not matter what women wrote in the media if they were "young and had a beautiful piece of ass." The press seemed to love what he was saying because he had money, was powerful, and wealthy. And his ego grew even bigger, and, in 1997, he stated that all women were gold diggers. From this period on, his tone and choice of words to describe women steadily deteriorated into downright vulgar.

Trump believes that he is God's gift to women. Back in 2004, he told Daily News that all the women on "The Apprentice" openly flirted with him, and he expected that because of his looks.

In 2006, he then tore into Rosie O'Donnell, calling her disgusting, a slob, and ugly. He later stated that Rosie was an unattractive individual both inside and out. His war of words with Rosie continues.

Even more shocking is that Trump made an incestuous quip in March 2006, when he stated that he might even date Ivanka if she were not his daughter. It makes you wonder what this guy fantasizes about at night. A year later, he slugged Angelina Jolie, saying that she was not beautiful. Since he was the owner of Miss World Pageant, he understood what beauty was, and she did not fall into that category.

In 2008, he had a tirade against Anne Hathaway, calling her a gold digger when her marriage broke up, stating that she had only married for money.

In 2009, former beauty queen, Carrie Prejean, mentioned that there was a “Trump Rule” where he would have all the beauty pageant contestants parade in front of him, and he would then separate what he believed were the “beauties” and “unattractive” girls. All the girls found this to be a very humiliating experience. In 2010, according to the New York Post, most female contestants in his pageants stated that Trump always objectified women by their breast size and “hotness.”

Then in 2011, he called breastfeeding “disgusting” when attorney Elizabeth Beck asked to take a break to breastfeed her 3-month-old daughter during a deposition over his failed Florida real estate project.

By 2011, Trump had lost control of all decent vocabulary. He called columnist Gail Collins of the NYT a “dog” because she wrote about his bankruptcies.

In August 2015, he called journalist Megyn Kelly of Fox News a “bimbo” after hosting the first Republican debate on the U.S. Presidential Election. A few days later, he suggested that her bizarre questioning resulted from her “menstruation.”

As the election process started in January 2016, he called Carly Fiorina, who was his opponent months ago, ugly.

In Sept 2016, he called former Miss Universe winner, Venezuelan actress Alicia Machado, “Miss Piggy” after stating that he was more like a voyeur than a chairman. She also stated that Trump had a disgusting habit of calling contestants slobs, fat pigs, and fat. To make matters worse, Trump then claimed that the model had starred in a sex tape, which later proved to be untrue. He was smearing more conspiracy theories and lies if any female spoke out against him.

Just two weeks ago, The Washington Post released a video from 2005 showing Trump bragging that he could “grab

women by their pussies” because he was a star. “They let you do it,” he boasted.

His chats on the Howard Stern show were released and show his true character. He spoke incessantly of sex and women, ranging from how hot Paris Hilton was at 12-years old to watching her sex video, rating women by their breast size, and walking into the back room where the Miss Universe Pageants were often semi-dressed. On his Apprentice show, he judged female contestants by their breast size and who he would like to take to bed. Former crew members from the show have mentioned that Trump continually talked about sex, women’s rear end, and cleavage. There was no topic on sex and women that he did not discuss.

So, where does this leave us?

The Presidential Election is just 3-weeks away. His opponent, Hilary Clinton, has consistently gotten herself into trouble with her private emails, her Clinton Foundation, and her husband’s not-so-secret affair with Monica Lewinski. She has her baggage, but it’s clear that Trump does not have the character or moral compass to be President of the U.S. He is narcissistic, prone to anger, labile moods, and has almost no respect for the female gender. He brings disrespect to the presidency because of his flawed character, says things to please his voters, and changes the tone where it suits him. Trump is a charlatan, false promises of a grandeur USA but deep within, nothing more than a con artist. Now that you have his short chronology on his attitudes towards women, only you are to blame if he becomes president. Anyone with common sense should either vote Clinton or stay home and watch T.V. If Trump is elected as the president of the greatest nation on earth, be prepared for chaos, lies, and deceit.

KAMALA HARRIS: A HEARTBEAT AWAY FROM THE OVAL OFFICE

Prison Life & Beyond Staff Writer

When the winner of the November 3, 2020, Presidential election was called, most of the limelight was on the former Vice President and the President-elect, Senator Joe Biden. But for women, people of color, and particularly women of color, the news was just as much, and I daresay even more, about the Vice President-elect, Senator Kamala Harris. When it was confirmed that as an American daughter of an Indian Mother and a Jamaican father, Kamala Harris would be breaking an over 300-hundred-year-old barrier to become the first Black, first Asian American, and first female Vice President of the United States, the celebration became an additional threefold. Mothers wept as they hugged their daughters, children high-fived their immigrant parents. The nation was agog with celebration. For many years, this was a pipe dream.

From slavery and ongoing systemic racism, the road to this moment has been muddy, bumpy, and traumatic for Black Americans, especially Black women, suffering at the bottom of the socio-economic totem pole. Until 1920, White men did not allow White women to vote in the United States, and, even with the "right to vote," Black people were not allowed to vote in most of the states in the South. When the Civil Rights Movement was organized in the 1960s, women were excluded from leadership roles, even though the movement rested significantly on their resources and tireless efforts; a notable case would be Rosa Parks who refused to relinquish her bus seat to a White passenger.

Black women have always been staunch civil and political supporters, getting little in return except a half-baked thank you and condescending smiles. It is why Black women largely regard this victory as a down payment for a debt that is long overdue.

Kamala Harris was not the first Black woman to aspire to the second-highest office in the country. In 1948, a Californian African American journalist and political activist, Charlotte Bass, ran for Vice President under the umbrella of the Progressive Party. In 1968, an Ohio native, Charlene Mitchell, became the first Black woman to run for the United States presidency under the Communists Party. Other independent Black female presidential candidates include Margaret Wright, People's Party in 1976; Isabell Masters, Looking Back Party in 1984, 1992, and 2004; Lenora Fulani, Independent in 1988 (the first woman and the first African American to appear on the ballot in all 50 states); Monica Moorehead, Workers World in 1996, 2000 and 2016; and Peta Lindsay, Party for Socialism and Liberation in 2012. Kamala Harris paid tribute to all these women who came before her during her acceptance speech.

"I'm thinking about her [my mother] and about the generations of women, Black Women, Asian, White, Latina, and Native American women, throughout our nation's history, who have paved the way for this moment tonight."

To top it all, Joe Biden would not have won the election without the solid support of Black women. According to exit polls of early and Election Day voters by NBC, 87% of Black Americans (primarily women) voted for Biden against 41% of white voters.

So, finally, who would have predicted, in 2020, a Black woman has been elected Vice President, a heartbeat away from the oval office. And given Joe Biden's age and four years to establish herself as a capable commander in chief, it is conceivable that a Black woman may become the first female president of the United States.

From the back of the bus, Rosa Parks, to a heartbeat away from the oval office, Kamala Harris!

TRUMP REFUSES TO CONCEDE

Prison Life & Beyond Staff Writer

For the first time in a long time, almost everyone in the United States could agree on one thing: Trump would not let concede the White House without a fight if he lost. But, as expected, he is refusing to comply.

Donald Trump lost the November 3, 2020, presidential election, both by popular votes and electoral college votes. Previous administrations have conceded gracefully and done everything within their power to make the transition seamless for the sake of the sanctity of the country, even though they harshly disagreed with the election results. But Donald Trump cannot let go.

Immediately, he began lying about the vote count, calling it fraudulent, rigged, a stolen election, and then moved to file lawsuits to have the ballots thrown out altogether. He compelled other government officials to rally behind him, abusing his office power as president to prevent the constitutional and democratic transition of government.

Ultimately, this attempt by Trump will come to naught as it would constitutionally require a ludicrous series of developments to reverse the election result. First, at least three state legislatures would have to protest it. Then, an approval of courts would have to be secured. Lastly, there would have to be an agreement by the US congress. But being a grossly undemocratic occurrence, one which most living Americans have only had to read and hear about, it will have a far-reaching effect on the country's democracy in the future. Trump's attempt to reverse a legitimate election is one of the gravest threats to democracy that the United States has faced in modern times. It is more consequential, if not ironic, coming from the commander in chief who has sworn to preserve the same.

There are examples of governments in other countries overturning presidential election results, as in 1988 when the

ruling party reversed the election results in Mexico. The same thing happened in Russia in 1996. Also, in Zimbabwe and Iran in 2002 and 2009, respectively. This is the side of history that President Trump hopes to join, and the Republican party leadership and supporters are embracing these false election claims. Trump is still popular with his Republican base, but they must know that the country comes first, not politics, and not pandering to the baseless whims of an aspiring dictator.

Trump's refusal to concede is anti-democratic, a ridiculous attempt by him to use his power of office to erase the people's voice and undermine the constitution of the United States. This is a classic illegitimate power grab. Over the past four years, nations of the world that considered the United States a country to emulate have lost respect for the American way of life once envied and admired. Americans and their country are coming undone right in the eyes of the world.

[LEAVE BOOK REVIEW | My Site 2 \(wixsite.com\)](#)

Smiles On A Good Day

Part 6.

Despite the drama, danger, craziness, loneliness, and stress of prison life, there are some good days, smiles, moments when you see the light at the end of the tunnel, and hope pushes you forward. You can "almost" let your guard down, exhale, and succumb to humorous activity and conversation. Such days, moments, occasions feel good; they are contagious. Without hope and expectation that "a change is gonna come" and a reason to smile now and again, serving prison time would be impossible, unbearable.

PLANT KLOWNS

**Kurt Michaels #E64903
San Quentin State Prison**

Adjacent is a haiku I wrote the first stanza to while listening to prisoners on this side of the building yelling to each other from cells near and far. All of them trying to have oh-so-serious conversations about nothing, while each individual pair, or group does their utmost to yell over everyone else's even-more-serious conversations about nothing. On a planet populated by clowns, they all seem to believe that the louder they are the more important / intelligent they are. Thus is the hierarchy upon which planet Circus formed and enforced.

The latter two stanzas were formed as I was creating an art card for my uncle's birthday. They were formed from the image of everyone, including myself, costumed and painted up as clowns. Then, whenever one of them is confronted with the truth of what they look like, and how they are behaving, imagine them pouting, crossing their arms over their polka-

dotted and squirting flower chests and, with all the attitude of a sulking five-year-old, exclaiming with the utmost indignation, “I am not a clown!” However, with the stomping of their feet in true childish temper-tantrum form, their floppy oversized shoes sound off with the “squeaky squeaky” of a dog's rubber chew toy. Last, yet certainly not least, all of this concludes with circus or Jack-In-The-Box theme music.

Such silly rather than serious imaginings are ways I have personally created which help me to keep things “here” in a less spiritually draining perspective, plus enable me to adhere to “Kurt’s Prayer.” In This I Pray, and “My Friend In Christ,” to the best of my ability.

MMA GRANNY

Christine White #1884794
State of Texas Mountain View Unit

As miserable as prison is, it can also be entertaining at times. I remember one day when two women were about to “throw down.” One was in her late forties, and the other was almost sixty. Both women were eccentric.

Well, as the “spit boxing.” (or arguing) between the two women escalated, we were all wondering if this argument would come to blows. They were only a few feet from each other when, suddenly, the older one rips her nightgown off over her head.

I was completely taken aback by this development because she did not have one stitch of underwear on. So then, while buck naked, she crouched down and began to sway back and forth, urging her adversary to “bring it.”

At the time, I believed she used this tactic to baffle or befuddle her opponent into submission. It seemed to work, too, because the fully clothed inmate said, “Oh, no ma’am!” and went back to her bunk. Well, that ended that.

Some of the others were not as stunned as my Bunkie and me. When we asked, “In prison fights, sometimes the person you’re fighting will try to pull your shirt or gown over your head and get several licks in while you are helplessly entangled and blinded.”

I was a bit unsettled about this and wondered if this bizarre type of “prison protocol” – if you’d call it that - would be a wise thing to do should I find myself in the same predicament. I think not. Then again, I guess it would depend on how big my opponent is.

I avoid drama. I’ve been locked up for three years and have not had to fight yet. However, if the situation should arise, I may have to use this technique (except I’ll have on undies). If it causes my foe to become puzzled or offended to the point

that she flees, then I'll know I've found an effective diversion to add to my defense arsenal. If not, then I may get my butt handed to me while "in the buff."

Thrown Off - The Funny Side of Crime

**Christine White #1884794
State of Texas Mountain View Unit**

One afternoon at the pill-line window, I noticed a woman that I had never seen before. At the time, I can remember thinking, “Poor girl seems a little thrown off.” My instincts proved to be spot on. The woman was next in line, and she stepped up to the nurse’s window so the nurse could scan her inmate I.D. card.

Then, in a flash, Ms. “Thrown Off” snatches the laser-scanner gun from the nurse and aims it at her fellow inmates, still standing in line, and attempts to zap us with it. Because the laser scanner did not emit any cool noises, “thrown off” began issuing her sound effects, which I would describe as “Kapeeew!”

All of us stood there, mouths agape, including the nurse. She was behind the window and really couldn’t do much anyway. Of course, the weak laser was harmless, but a nearby officer was not amused. The officer barked an order for “thrown off” to “drop it!” which was ignored and met with a “Kapeeew!”

Obviously, the woman had issues, one of which was an unruly inner child that was, apparently, hard to control. The officer began to close in on our laser-tag enthusiast, who then dropped the scanner and tried to take off running. She didn’t get far. Her antics got her tackled like a sluggish wide receiver. She was taken off the unit soon afterward, in a nightgown. That’s the standard issue when you are on your way to the psych department. Hopefully, our thrown-off friend got the help she needs.

A NEW BEGINNING

Melinda Davis #532790

It's the middle of the night. I've been sitting on the kitchen floor for a long time, staring at the scattered shards of glass from the cup I shattered. I had thrown it at the floor in a blind rage. The shards are soaked in spilled liquor.

When I was ten, my alcoholic mom beat me up for messing up her kitchen, trying to make her a birthday cake. She had thrown me around so badly that my prized clay mixing bowl was knocked off the kitchen counter and smashed into pieces. But my best friend, the boy next door, had quietly glued it all together. It had taken him a whole day to mend.

Fifteen years later, I married him.

The years haven't always been kind to us. We have three daughters, and our food truck business did not make ends meet. However, my husband never complained, and I only realized the toll it had taken on him when he started selling drugs on the side.

While we needed the money, I did try to stop him from dealing; he has been in prison for five years. So now I stretch my savings across all our plates, feeding the girls and ignoring my hunger most nights. I tell them that they can't go shopping with their friends. Since closing our food truck, I work a dead-end job. At least once a month, I request time off to take the girls to see their father.

One night of drinking the pain away became a habit, and I became my mother, yelling at my kids for the slightest slip-ups, locking myself in the bathroom room so I could drink without being disturbed. My husband doesn't know yet, but he knows something's wrong. I've been irritable with him during visitation, snapping at his questions about our girls. He thinks I'm not as in love with him as I used to be. He thinks I'm going to leave him. He was the first human to show me what unconditional love meant. He never left my side, even when times were hard. When our family was suffering, he did what

he believed he had to do, knowing he was risking his freedom. No one else would have done that for me, for us.

Tonight, I won't drink. I'm done!

The alcohol can't do for me what my husband does. Alcohol can't love my children and me the way he loves us. It wouldn't die for us as he would. It wouldn't suffer silently like he suffers each visiting day, hoping his brave, smiling face will keep us strong. And it does.

Tonight, I've placed the clay bowl in the center of the kitchen counter, where it will always remain to remind me. We might have cracks in our life, but we'll be whole again. This day is a good day!

[LEAVE BOOK REVIEW | My Site 2 \(wixsite.com\)](#)

Commentary

Part 7.

Prisoners have opinions on every national and world event, including terrorism, celebrities, global warming, politics, gay marriage, and an array of other topics engaging to curious minds. They do not mind sharing their commentary and observations and telling the powers that be how to solve foreign and domestic problems. No subject is off limits. This section deep dives into smorgasbord of world issues.

2020 A YEAR TO REMEMBER

**Tamara Hinkle #W60789
California Institution for Women**

The year 2020 has been one never to be forgotten! From the deaths of Kobe and Gianna Bryant, the killing of George Floyd, and the spread of Covid-19, the world we once knew has changed forever.

It's easy to complain, blame, shift, and take on the role of back seat driver, but the course of history has altered one voice at a time. I will never forget how good it felt watching whites, Latinxs, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and the LGBTQ+ communities unite while declaring that #BLACK LIVES MATTER! In Beverly Hills, Hollywood, and worldwide that 9:29 seconds worth of George Floyd's cries to live were not in vain! People took a stand against police brutality and the many injustices the "powers that be" create to oppress non-whites. Not only did they talk it, but my fellow comrades walked it...to the polls, to the streets, court buildings, and offices of those responsible for the systemic marginalization of "We the People."

Our ancestors' blood, sweat, and tears built this country. The descendants of these oppressed people continue to fight for the

right to achieve the American dream. We don't want handouts, low-grade real estate, redlined communities, nor subservient jobs. We want equal opportunities to succeed and positively impact society, the world.

We've demanded changes, advocated for the underdog, AND been forced to stay at home. Yet, in these nine months, people have spent quality time creating familial memories, adopting rescue animals, and paying it forward, choosing to become rays of light in this dark world.

America is still a work in progress, and 2020 has caused us to reflect, be held accountable, resilient, honest, vulnerable, united, and persevere to become better people...who will, in hindsight, declare 2020 to have been the year of victory!
THIS TOO SHALL PASS!

I am wishing you a Happy New Year! Stay healthy and safe.

I CAN'T BREATHE!

Released - Previously Incarcerated Contributor

After videos of the killing of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis went viral on social media and news platforms, protests raged across American cities non-stop. In Dallas, Texas, residents are marching across the city with signs, confronting police officers, pouring outrage over the death of George Floyd and other unarmed black men killed by police.

The Dallas protests began peacefully but deteriorated into scenes of violence, looting, and vandalism. Police say over 700 people participated Saturday, where a Texas Department of public safety vehicle and buildings were spray painted and multiple cars damaged. Officers dispersed the crowd around the city hall area using tear gas, but some groups continued to destroy property, and by evening looting had begun. Police made at least 74 arrests.

Dallas Police Chief, Renee Hall, condemned the looting and destruction of property while narrating how protesters threw bricks at her squad car: "I do know that my officers had the direction to make sure this was a peaceful protest and provide traffic control. We had all the streets blocked off. They had the run of the streets. Everything was peaceful. Then, suddenly, bricks started hailing, hitting our squad car... hitting the officers. We have an officer who Dallas Fire-Rescue is treating. And then I almost got hit with a brick."

The protests which continued Sunday saw traffic blocked by the protesters on the West 7th Street bridge in Fort Worth, which forced police to use tear gas to disperse the crowd. Meanwhile, Dallas has issued a mandatory 7 p.m. curfew for parts of the city to last for several days in response to the violent protests. The areas affected by the curfew are Deep Ellum, Farmers Market, Cedars, Central Business District, West End, Victory Park, and Uptown. Police Chief Renee Hall said some areas would not be accessible, as roadblocks will be set up, and residents who need to get home must identify

themselves. She reiterated that anyone caught violating the curfew will be arrested.

In a further development, Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster following the sustained violence and chaos. The city is on edge. Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson followed by issuing a disaster declaration. The death of George Floyd, unarmed and handcuffed, pleading for his life as the world looked on, was more than citizens, black or white, could ignore. Outrage, disruption, and even violence were predictable in Dallas and around the nation. There seems to be no end to killing unarmed black men by white police officers, and there appears to be no way to predict when it will happen again, except that we know it will.

Another One Dead And Gone

George Floyd Minneapolis 5/25/20

Dontre Hamilton Milwaukee 4/30/14

Eric Garner New York 5/17/14

Philando Castile Falcon Heights 7/6/16

Alton Sterling 7/ 5/16 Baton Rouge

John Crawford III 8/5/14 Dayton

Michael Brown Jr. Ferguson 8/9/14

Tamir Rice Cleveland 11/22/14

Walter Scott North Charleston 4/4/15

THE REASONS FOR HIGH RECIDIVISM RATES

Previously Incarcerated Contributor

Recidivism rates in America are unusually high, over 70%. Seventy out of 100 people released from prison will find themselves incarcerated again and in less than 5-years. It's been this way for so long that we don't even question it anymore. We take it as true that more than 70% of the people released from prison are going back no matter what we do. These beliefs are used to deny employment to ex-convicts and justify landlord's refusal to rent to them. Even the government's gotten into the act, refusing public housing to parolees with drug convictions. Any one of these restrictions could be the deciding factor in an ex-con's success, but, together, they exponentially increase his odds of failure until failure's all but guaranteed.

Inmates preparing to reenter society know the odds are stacked against them long before they walk through the gates to freedom, and yet, somehow, we allow our optimism to get the best of us. As our time draws to a close, we make plans for life outside, plans that don't even contemplate the odds of failure. Mostly, we believe that, despite overwhelming odds, we'll be able to make it into that magical category, that 20 to 30 percent of people that manage to defy the odds. Sadly, most end up having their hopes and dreams crushed, slowly, and then with ever-increasing speed, as they encounter distrust, skepticism, even outright hatred from people who know nothing more about us than our offender status. And yet, we continue to try, to give it our best, hoping beyond hope that we can somehow prevail.

I don't know of any way to alter a society's preconceived notion. Technology like that would be sure to keep everyone up at night, fearful of how an individual might be using it. While I can't change a society's preconceived notions, I should be able to take whatever actions I believe necessary to

increase the chances of my success upon release. After all, I'm the one who's going to have to live with the consequences, good or bad, so shouldn't I have a say in how I prepare myself? Unfortunately, California, like many states, takes an opposing view. While they're perfectly content to allow me to take part in meaningless groups with fellow inmates, groups that sound good on paper, groups with names like "Victim Impact" or "Anger Management," at the end of the day, that's about the only meaningful act they'll allow.

Each prisoner has a unique story for having failed, but, without exception, we all share the same three core concepts for successful reentry: (1) preparation, (2) preparation, and (3) preparation. Every task we set out to complete, no matter how trivial or how daunting, is shaping our skills to reenter a society that has, rightfully or not, already given up on us. This isn't an excuse for failure, nor does it make the task impossible, just more challenging.

To those unfamiliar with how the prison system operates, the obvious question is: If you know that preparation is essential, why aren't you using your lengthy prison sentence to prepare for a life outside the prison environment? To that, I say, "if it were only that easy..."

There are some problems with preparing oneself for reentering society from a prison environment. First is the complete uncertainty surrounding one's future plans. Release dates are likely to change for any reason. Some dates can be planned for, such as earning additional time off for good conduct, but too often, the changes which occur happen at the last minute and impact the hopeful parolee in a highly negative way. I recently watched one of the guys here go through all sorts of changes, getting himself ready to be released. He had written hundreds of letters trying to find a place to live and contacted different organizations to secure transportation from the bus to his destination; he even managed to convince someone to donate clothing to wear on his release day. At the last moment, prison officials tell him that he must serve another eight months due to a

miscalculation on their part. To say he was upset would be an understatement, but he handled it well and set out on another letter-writing campaign, only to learn that those who were willing to help him were now feeling frustrated and fed up with the whole thing.

I've seen others undergo similar disappointments, securing everything from a nice apartment to employment, long before being released, only to be told at the last minute that they're not going to be paroled to that location because their victim doesn't feel comfortable with them living or working so close. Forget about the fact that the hopeful parolee was born and raised in the area, or that his family and friends, people critical to his support, also live there? The prison system is judge, jury, and executioner, and the hopeful parolee's plans are changed at a moment's notice. It's no wonder the recidivism rate is so high!

Those most interested in success struggle to take advantage of whatever educational opportunities are available to them while in custody. Unfortunately, these opportunities are limited, with most being worth next to nothing in the real world. There are always exceptions, such as a high school dropout earning a GED, but what then? Can that prisoner continue to college to earn a degree in a career that interests him?

Educational opportunities are defined as those opportunities which interest the hopeful parolee, not only because it's something he has an interest in learning, but because he knows it is something he can use upon release. For example, why offer classes in psychology, when you know your students are not likely to complete the seven plus years of educational requirements needed to pass, let alone the on-the-job training, and even then, who could ever, ever hope to be granted a license to practice as a psychologist with a criminal background. Yet, these are the types of introductory courses offered throughout the prison system, not because the prison has any real hopes of seeing their students complete such a rigorous and prolonged schedule, but because this allows the

prison to look good on paper (look at what we're teaching these guys!!). At the same time, not teaching inmates anything they could use to gain meaningful employment.

There are meaningful courses offered in prison, but you can bet that, when offered, they help the prison administration's public relations' image far more than the hopeful parolee, and even then, waiting lists are backlogged for years, decades even, not months; what you'll rarely see, if ever, are courses that appeal to a hopeful parolee's personal choice of career, and you're certainly not going to see many courses offered which might offer a chance to make it out of poverty.

Ask any inmate what he needs to be doing to increase his chances for success, and most will tell you the same thing: allow me an education in something that interests me, something I want to do for my livelihood, and allow me to save money the prison can't take every single time I make it. But this, as those of us in here already know, doesn't serve the prison's bottom line. There are too many people who make far too much money locking us up to take a serious interest in seeing the recidivism rate drop. Corruption is widespread in the prison system, with far too many earning more money than their qualifications merit. To carry out a plan which might result in success would mean a decrease in the number of people incarcerated, which in turn means fewer opportunities for profiteers. It's a no-brainer. Profit wins! The taxpayers lose. We continue serving time!

WHAT'S MORALITY GO TO DO WITH IT?

**Kenneth Foster #1451768
State of Texas Hughes Unit**

I feel an issue needs addressing regarding the angles certain activists take fighting the death penalty. With this comes a particular understanding and acceptance of reality. If one can't face the reality of a situation, how can a proper solution be found? Stokely Carmichael pointed it out correctly when he said:

"To get the right answers, one must pose the right questions. To find effective solutions, one must formulate the problem correctly. One must start from premises rooted in truth and reality rather than myth."

The above refers to a conversation I had with an activist associated with a well-known anti-death penalty group here in Texas. As we discussed different tactics to fight the death penalty, he pointed out that we must make the death penalty a morality issue with politicians. I was shocked at that reasoning and pointed out to him why. How can we make the death penalty a matter of morality with politicians when their "morals" tell them that the death penalty is a right and acceptable thing? Not only is the death penalty "morally" acceptable to many politicians, but it is also a part of their religious beliefs. Many of these pseudo-Christians will quote the Biblical scriptures of "eye for an eye" to you in a heartbeat. That is indeed something of a deeper decay that requires a discussion at another time. I know that I don't have to tell any of you how "eye for an eye" is contradictory to what Jesus taught. Plain and simple, any person believing in the eye for an eye shouldn't call himself a Christian! The point is, we're dealing with a society that has warped and polluted a righteous ideology/religion. In the face of love and forgiveness, politicians still act out with hate and vengeance, polluted and twisted mentality. So, trying to teach morals to these people would be like trying to teach sanity to a

psychopath. The bottom line is that we can't abolish the death penalty believing we're going to do so by showing politicians that they are wrong through a verbal expression of morality.

Steven Hawkins (Executive Director of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty) said:

"The **ONLY** approach that will abolish the death penalty within our lifetime is by an **AGGRESSIVE, CONCERTED**, broad-based, grassroots effort that **DEMANDS** death penalty repeal state by state, legislature by legislature." (my emphasis added). I agree! He didn't say that we'll be successful passing out flyers or lighting candles when people are being filled with poison. He said we must be aggressive (this doesn't mean violent) and be concerted (which means to plan). He also said that we must **DEMAND** the death penalty be repealed. This isn't asking or begging, or compromising. When you demand something, an **URGENT** pronouncement is made. It's a way of telling somebody to do something and accepting nothing less. As these "activists" continue to accept less, the death row population becomes less and less.

We must realize that we're dealing with a country that only knows how to talk through force. America lives by the power of the sword. You gain power over a person in one of two ways: by winning their heart or breaking their spirit. This country follows the latter. To be in tune with this reality is to understand that you cannot overcome an attack by being passive. The state of Texas has no embarrassment about stating that it is a killer state and good at it. We can't rightfully become killers of politicians in that sense, but we must learn how to "execute" political power.

Martin Luther King Jr. broke it down best, and this needs to be a strategy that all anti-death penalty activists internalize and carry out. He said, "morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. The law may not change the heart, but it can restrain the heartless. It will take education and religion to change bad internal activities, but legislation and court orders can."

Some people can't understand spirituality, but they can understand that if you do this someone will get on your ass! That's what we must do. We've got to let people know what we're willing to get all the way down for, to show that we're tired of these wicked laws. When I write poems like "Let's Start Organizing" and "We Don't Need Mourners, We Need Organizers," I mean that! As inmates, we have a responsibility to relay this to those that are in anti-death penalty activism. We must be constant reminders that this cannot be a passive battle. Holding vigils at executions is like taking spitballs to a gunfight! We're losing because politicians aren't taking this movement seriously. They don't feel a threat. The threat must be physically in the streets and economic (like with the Voters Initiative). That's what they feel. The legislators, death penalty supporters, don't feel morality and spirituality. Only when this soaks in will a difference be made in totality.

PRISONERS AS EXPERTS

Timothy J. Muise
Previously Incarcerated Contributor

Members of the Legislature spend years drafting and implement legislation that will advance the cause for criminal justice reform. They conduct studies, enlist expert opinions from think tanks, and speak to prison employees and public safety officials about cause-and-effect interpretations. But, unfortunately, the one voice which is most times excluded is that of the prisoner. The prisoner is an expert on prison operating procedures.

When the voice of the educated prisoner is involved in the process, it can be used to accurately define what works in the system and what does not work. No prison official will ever speak of the abuses in solitary confinement, but the prisoner expert will. No prison hospital employee will ever whistleblow about how dying men and women are treated as if they are animals, but the expert prisoner activist can give specific examples.

Prisoner experts know firsthand the specifics of a system that works to deplete self-esteem as a control tool; it also works well to ensure future generations of guards and administrators. This depletion of self-worth and self-esteem is counter to what rehabilitation is supposed to be for the individual, that being the quest for self-realization. The current prison procedure is to tear men/women down with no plan to build them up. This is the primary defect in the American penal system.

The prisoner's voice can be a cautionary tale in the epic failure of the tough-on-crime era. It can also be a rallying cry for the injection of hope that comes with cost-effective, prisoner-run programming like Lifers' Group, Cultural Committees, and projects conducted with community agencies. The expert voice of the prisoner will map out the need to build proper foundations in job training, addiction

support networks, housing assistance, and family reunification. It's not rocket science, but these key elements are ignored in today's prison industrial complex.

Here in Massachusetts, we are working on getting the prisoner's voice back into the Senate and House Chambers of the State House. We are working with lawmakers to add this missing element to the equation for real criminal justice reform. As the process moves forward, we will keep you posted.

THE “N” WORD BOMB!

Jabberwocky (Anonymous)

Okay, for certain cultural movies, not okay for TV, the “N” word bomb. We are going to be completely honest here, what the hell nx#\$a? It’s always been a sore spot, still to this day. If you’re black, you can say what’s up, my nx#\$a, or nx#\$a all day long. I know white guys that call their homies or guys nx#\$a because I’ve seen it happen. I know very few white guys who can get away with saying it, but it depends on how they grew up and who they grew up around. It is, and always will be, a double-sided coin.

White Bitch this, white hoe that, snow bunnies, but if white people come up with “White” Entertainment Awards like Black Entertainment Awards, I believe whites would get in trouble, same thing with Black History Month. What about White History Month?

I know, in prison, the race war is alive and healthy. There are about 1,200 inmates 750 to 800 of them are African American. What’s going on? And a stereotype in Wisconsin is, if you’re white in prison, you’re automatically a child molester. Come on, guys! Are you nx#\$a’s serious? But in public dialogue, it’s accepted among certain groups of friends, but not accepted when you’re around people you don’t know or are not comfortable with; it’s not accepted in professional settings. If you ask me, these nx#\$a’s need to man up, stop crying, and stop letting it bother them so much. It’s not like they experienced the brutality of slavery. They should not let it affect them as much as it does, but they do; the shit’s done and over with long ago. However, they were “conditioned” by their parents and grandparents to grow up hating the word.

History can’t be changed, but in a couple hundred years everyone will be closer to one color. So does all this crap even matter? What we need is love and peace, not hate and diversity, but who am I fooling? It won’t happen in my or my kids’ lifetime.

TO KNEEL OR NOT TO KNEEL

**Shawn L. Perrot CDCR# V-42461
Mule Creek State Prison**

Colin Kaepernick, starting quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, recently decided not to stand during the singing of the national anthem. When asked about his decision to "take a knee," he said it was because he was showing support for the #BlackLivesmatter movement, his way of shining a national spotlight on a systematic pattern of racism in the nation's police force. Putting aside, for the moment, the accuracy of these accusations, the argument now concerns his chosen method of showing support.

A democratic system of government stands zero chance of success if it doesn't also include the right to freedom of speech. As I see it, the right to freedom of speech includes two core components. The first is the right to express a contrary opinion, no matter how reprehensible it might seem to others. We have a right to express our difference of opinion, free from censorship or retaliation; otherwise, the right to speak is meaningless. The more opposed your position, the viler your position, the more meaningful your right to speak out becomes, and for a good reason, as history has proven, time and time again.

The second core component includes the right to protest, stand up in the streets as a group, and voice your opinion. Without it, you're just a lone voice, unless you're expressing an opposing view, in which case you're a lunatic.

Having determined that citizens in a democratic country possess the right to express even the vilest of opinions, and in a public forum, the only question remains: how should these rights be expressed. With the ever-increasing availability of the Internet, many choose to express themselves from the comfort (and safety) of their homes; others choose to wear ironic t-shirts or even by their decisions during the election

process. Perhaps the most frequently used method involves the right to assemble in a public place, with others of a like mind, showing how popular your opposing views are. Some, however, believe that the more offensive the manner chosen to express yourself, the more attention it's going to receive, and therefore, the more seriously it's going to be taken. Colin Kaepernick appears to have chosen the latter, expressing himself in what many believe is blatant disrespect, not only to the country which gave him his rights to freedom of speech, but also to the men who fought and died to guarantee that right.

Let's be clear. There are no laws on the books that says Kaepernick must stand during the singing of the national anthem, and if there were, it would most certainly be against both the letter and the spirit of our first amendment, which guarantees the right to free speech. However, just because it's not illegal doesn't mean it is right. Standing during the singing of the national anthem is meant to show respect for the home country. Attend a sporting event on foreign soil, and you'll stand, not because you share the beliefs of that country, but because you're trying to show respect to your host, just as foreigners will stand during the national anthem while in our country.

While it's true that Kaepernick's conduct is protected speech, it's just as true that his actions are being taken as contempt, and even disrespect, for not only the country but also the men who sacrificed their lives to give him that right. But there's another factor people are overlooking when Kaepernick refuses to stand. By choosing a manner of protest universally viewed as disrespectful to an entire nation, what Kaepernick's doing is accusing everyone in this country of being a part of the problem he's protesting, and nothing could be further from the truth. Most people are entirely in support of reducing incidents of police brutality, even people like me, people who believe that most acts aren't related to racism but instead have more to do with corruption, but when he refuses to stand. I can't help feel that he's also accusing me.

It's his right to refuse to stand during the singing of the national anthem. As I said earlier, the more offensive a person's point-of-view, the more protected his speech should be, but keep in mind that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. While it's true that arresting him for exercising his right to express himself might not be permissible in a democratic society, this doesn't mean I have to support his decision. I love most about this country because I'm every bit as free to express myself in response to his, or anyone else's view, a fact which didn't go overlooked by the authorities in San Francisco. When they tried to hire off-duty officers to provide security during the 49er's home games, most refused, saying that they'd continue to decline until he started showing proper respect for the country.

I think that taking a knee during the singing of the national anthem or even burning your country's flag can be the most profound acts of free speech imaginable. Still, there's a time and a place for everything, and more importantly, a reason. This is neither the time nor the place, and this certainly isn't a legitimate reason. Save your acts of contempt towards the country for when your nation does something contemptible. For instance, if you woke up tomorrow morning to find out that your government authorized military force to defend another country's decision to permit slavery, then refuse to stand during the singing of the national anthem or burn a flag in the middle of the street. After all, your nation just did something worthy of contempt, and it's your country's official policy you're protesting, but choosing this reason to disrespect your country and everyone in it, is something I refuse to support.

In looking for a solution, I'm reminded of something my mother used to tell me as a child: "If you want to live under my roof, then you'll live by my rules." While public entities might not have the authority to mandate standing or otherwise to show respect during the singing of the national anthem, the NFL isn't a public entity. It's a private business and capable of making and enforcing its own rules and regulations. Suppose

the commissioner doesn't want to create any controversy by forcing the employees of the NFL to stand during the singing of the national anthem. Why not simply ban those people from entering the stadium until the anthem has been sung? A simple solution, wouldn't you say?

HIGHER EDUCATION VS HIGH PRIORITY

Thomas Ford #91457-004
Federal Correctional Facility

In June 2016, the U. S. Department of Education announced that 67 colleges and universities would be offering inmates classes at over 100 federal and state prisons under their Second Chance Pell Pilot Program.

But before you buy your “back to school” supplies and sharpen your pencils, there is good reason to consider that this “pilot program” may not even land at a prison near you. Indeed, I’m hoping that this announcement is more substantive than propaganda for a failing correctional system.

Research supports the need for post-secondary education. Inmates who engage in educational programs are more than 40% less likely to reoffend in the few years after incarceration than their non-programming counterparts. Better educated parolees also have an edge up on finding employment.

Although the need for such education is obvious, the qualifications for obtaining a grant for school are less than forthright and are raising more questions than can be answered at this time. When I asked a teacher at my facility about the Pell grant program, I got the standard “deer in the headlights” look and a definitive shake of the head answer. Essentially, the Status quo.

The wheels of justice aren’t the only things moving slowly in government. After receiving an email from an attorney firm with news of a new school district being established in the Bureau of Prisons specifically for the better education of federal inmates, the education department at my facility still had no knowledge of this.

I must question the integrity of a government agency that releases information about a new directive for their prison education program, yet when approached for basic details, have no clue whatsoever as to implementation.

Now, if you have the money to spend, you'll have no problem finding the opportunity for higher education at the BOP. Several Higher Education vs. High Priority colleges and universities offer two and four-year degrees through a correspondence course program. Even though these institutions offer classes designed and targeted to the incarcerated student, the cost for this education is prohibitive for most inmates, which makes the Pell grant program that much more critical for those inmates who want to further their education.

But here's a catch; the grant program will only be offered to 12,000 prisoners, a minute number when you factor in how many individuals are incarcerated between federal and state prisons. This initiative may be a move in the right direction, but I call it the "BOP two-step," another government program where we take one step forward in the idea and two steps back in the implementation.

It is unclear what to expect from the U. S. Justice Department or the country's education system with a new republican presidential administration in the White House. After being an inmate in the BOP for nearly seven years, I've seen first-hand other initiatives with "good intentions." For example, the compassionate release program is designed to offer early release from prison to those inmates with life-threatening health issues. Unfortunately, the criteria for qualifications in this program are so complicated it ends up not being helpful to the few who could use it.

As it goes, these "help the inmate" initiatives almost always look good on paper, but the success of these programs is in the implementation and advocacy of staff at the institutional level. And with the "just show up and get paid" philosophy I've seen of staff members at my facility, it'll be a long time coming before any of us can enjoy a higher education in the prison system.

NATIONAL MEASLES EPIDEMIC

Prisoner #415266, former Board-Certified Pediatrician,

A contagious disease epidemic requires the perfect storm alignment of two elements, susceptible persons and exposure. The metaphor of fire is aptly suited – a forest fire requires both fuel (trees) and heat (match, campfire, or lighting). Missing one of the two elements, a measles epidemic will not "ignite."

The disease model of smallpox is well suited to provide instruction regarding measles. Smallpox vaccinations of bygone years were discontinued. We are all susceptible, and our safety is derived solely from the virtual impossibility of smallpox exposure. While relatively rare, measles, unlike smallpox, has not become irradiated. The risk of measles exposure may wax and wane, so we must be ever vigilant. The two elements mentioned above regarding measles are both variable and interdependent. As the number of susceptible persons diminishes, ultimately so too does the likelihood of measles exposure. But when the number of susceptible persons grows, the possibility of exposure may or may not likewise increase, depending upon the measles virus rarity at the time.

As the masses are successfully immunized against measles, the confidence of those vaccinated grows to the point of arrogance. The trust is a compounded entity derived from both the MMR shot protection and the resultant rarity of the measles virus. Those who elect not to be immunized may attain a similar arrogance, not compounded but singularly based upon the derived unlikelihood of exposure.

I am confident that parents on either side of the issue are ingenious and are devoid of any sinister motives. As they ponder the risk versus benefit calculus, I'm sure it can be assumed that all the children are loved and that parents strive to minimize risk, risk as they perceive it. The above use of the word "arrogance" was unfair but helpful in making a point. The confidence which parents attain through immunizing their

children is well earned. By assuming the inherent risk of the vaccine, they pay in full any debt for the confidence derived, notwithstanding the extreme likelihood that such vaccine risk is minuscule compared to disease risk. While conceding parents who refuse to immunize love their children nonetheless, some negativity might be applied. Akin to a parasitic relationship, some would say, unimmunized children typically remain safe, directly attributable to the risk undertaken by the immunized. The unimmunized rely on the rarity of the virus bought and paid for on the backs of the vaccinated.

Hindsight is 20/20. Some elect immunization and have a catastrophic event, while others elect not to immunize and pay the unthinkable price when contracting the disease. The aftermath on either side is perpetual remorse and guilt. The best a parent can do is become well informed and play the odds in the child's best interest.

"They" say, in consensus, that getting the measles immunization is by far the option of least risk for typical children. The "they" includes those who should be in the know, most pediatricians, and collectively the Academy of Pediatrics. Returning to the word "arrogance," it would seem very presumptive for a parent to supplant their knowledge and judgment for that of a medical expert.

The 2019 measles epidemic may appear to some as an aberration fueled by an endless supply of susceptible persons. (A pool not equally distributed, as not the virus itself. There are hot spots such as New York). Consider, however, a hypothetical. Suppose in the year 2011, the population of those susceptible to measles was gargantuan. This could, in reality, be an unrecognized fact. The "epidemic waiting to happen" may have never materialized simply because no "ground zero" person was introduced to upset the status quo. Thus, the 2019 measles epidemic is not a "new" phenomenon according to "old" principles.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, there have been 971 cases of measles reported in the U.S. this year, the

most significant number of cases in a single year in nearly three decades. And guess what? Measles is preventable.

KIM KARDASHIAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE CRUSADER

**Lyle C. May #0580028
Central Prison, N.C.**

Celebrity news outlet TMZ recently reported that socialite and entrepreneur Kim Kardashian supports a California death row prisoner's innocence claim, pressing democratic governor Gavin Newsome for new DNA testing in the case. The story is merely the latest example in TMZ's increasingly serious take on the rich and famous lifestyles. Donald Trump has that effect on people, eliminating by-standers in social justice, generating greater awareness of the issues impacting America, and forcing everyone to choose where they stand. It is not by his design; just a response people have to the vile things he says and does. For Hollywood, which Trump has directly attacked for their support of democrats and people like Kim Kardashian, silence or senseless babble is no longer an option. Too much is at stake.

Kim is not the first celebrity to take on criminal justice reform or champion prisoners. She follows John Legend, Henry Rollins, Johnny Depp, Brian Warner (Marilyn Manson), Russel Simmons, Dick Gregory, Danny Glover, Jim Brown, Angela Davis, and others who have used celebrity to help the incarcerated and condemned. However, Kim differs in her social media platform, her followers' age and socio-economic status, her lack of vested interest in criminal justice reform, and her direct line to the President of the United States of America. Fashion diva or reality star - whatever wrought Kim Kardashian's stardom matters less than her willingness to shine that light on the ugly truth about criminal justice in America. Those with capital get justice. Fair representation is a luxury not afforded to the poor.

Alice Marie Johnson, a 63-year-old woman serving a life sentence for a non-violent drug charge, discovered the power of Kim Kardashian's benevolence. Kim secured Johnson's pardon and release from Trump, along with sixteen other non-

violent drug offenders. These people were convicted in the 90s under the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which mandated stricter sentences for drug trafficking and possession of illicit substances like crack cocaine. The law made mandatory minimums and life without parole common vernacular in criminal justice, vastly contributing to mass incarceration and the disproportionate imprisonment of minorities.

Kim's crusade came when Jared Kushner assisted with the First Step Act, a weak sentence reform bill intended to release low-level non-violated federal prisoners convicted of drug crimes. The FSA tried to balance the tilted scales of justice, but it is a baby's stumble on the jagged foothills of mass incarceration like Kim's efforts.

No one should deny Kim Kardashian or anyone who advocates for criminal justice reform respect for helping people in prison. She has assisted in the release and re-entry of seventeen citizens, more than most Americans can or would do. But, the politics of crime aside, celebrity should not rest on the empty laurels of fame and fortune; it carries a more profound responsibility that demonstrates civic leadership in return for adoration.

Kim's latest advocacy is different from the previous prisoners. A man on death row claims he is innocent. The victim's family believe he is guilty. Kim has asked for and been granted through her attorneys a new DNA test for the prisoner, the results of which are pending. The stakes do not get any higher than a death penalty case. If the DNA proves the man is wrongfully convicted, maybe Kim will create a non-profit innocence project for California's death row people. Even if the DNA test affirms the man's conviction, Kim Kardashian has done a lot for criminal justice reform and should be proud. A non-profit focused on examining unjust sentences would be another wise investment for Kim. Maybe she can enlist Kylie Jenner to help fund the project.

I look forward to seeing her tackle the mountain of mass incarceration and applaud Kim or anyone else willing to invest time and money to combat America's mass incarceration.

IS RACIAL UNITY REALLY POSSIBLE?

Luis Villegas #J87443

California Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Prison

My feeling about race in America is hard for me to admit, but I do not believe racial unity will ever be possible. I am Mexican, and I have felt the sting of racism. I had a white stepfather and grew up in a white neighborhood from ten years old. Honestly, I felt like an outcast, and it only pushed me back to my Mexican heritage. I only wanted to go back to where my family lived in East Los Angeles.

Some people use racism to bully or dominate other people. Some use it to benefit themselves, in an argument, or to get out of trouble. I have used the race card when detained by police or an authority figure. Racism exists on so many levels, and not just the color of one's skin; it's the rich over the poor, powerful countries over struggling countries, and so on. It's pride and ego.

Who in this world is of pure blood? Mexicans are North Americans, natives mixed with Spanish blood. North America does not claim us. The Spaniards do not claim us, and neither do the Native Americans. I approached a native American prisoner once and asked him if I could sweat. He told me no because I was not a native. I'm not native?!?! This rejection upset me a great deal as I stared back at this pale, green-eyed, freckled face kid. I said, "Look at me and my brown skin. Tell me I'm not native to this land." He looked at me with a stupid, blank look on his face as if I were from another planet.

Some people say Adolf Hitler was half Jewish. On the TV program PBS, I saw this special on this white guy, a white supremacist, high up in the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan. They ran a DNA test on him and, guess what? He had ancestors who were black, excuse me, African American. Even different religions pit against each other, how to follow God properly, and so on. No one knows anything beyond this life, and that's

why it's called faith. We can only live our lives to the best of our ability and hope it's good enough.

The funniest thing is those who are constantly judging others in life are the ones that have the most to hide. Just be a good person and be around good people. Stay away from those people who judge or do harm to others. Do not be influenced by these serpents with their forked tongues. You know what you should do, how to act, and who you should be.

Change should come from within first. Some people spend their whole lives seeking inner peace and never achieve it. But isn't traveling this road of life all about the journey? I love this quote: "Some theologians say, if God sees the future, he loses some of his power, because then even God can't change the course of events." If God sees the future, it's going to happen regardless. But if God creates the future, he is indeed all-powerful.

Racism is a door, but you hold the key. You can't allow ignorance to dictate what you do or who you are. Some of those people love misery. I choose to be better and hopeful. Soak my words in or throw them away, but I've said my piece. Hey, this is my opinion.

ON FUNDAMENTAL FORGIVENESS

**Sandra Brown #R35900
Lincoln Correctional Center**

I find it baffling that today racism thrives in our global community. From Trayvon Martin to Freddie Gray, to Michael Brown, to Ethel Nance, our hearts continue to grieve such tragic, senseless losses. We cried, rioted, held vigils, protested, petitioned, and prayed. One of the most moving responses came from Ethel Nance's daughter, Nadine Collier. She looked South Carolina church shooter, murderer Dylan Roof in the eyes and personified faith in three words. She said, "I forgive you." Riddled with raw pain and outrage, Collier found the strength and resilience evident in those who walk by faith in the most profound sense and not by sight to forgive the man who had taken her mother's life. "She's a better woman than me," say many with whom I have shared my sadness behind this tragedy.

Collier knows the fundamental importance of forgiveness; she knows the scope of its power, and, as a woman of faith, she knows that forgiveness is an obligation, not an option. We live in an extremely unforgiving world because tragedy and disappointment have caused us to lose faith. Unforgiveness also abounds because we have forgotten that we are all human, all hurting, need forgiveness, and forgiveness is vital to our self-healing. That Collier can speak such life-changing words in response to so great a loss reflects the depth of her trust and faith. Her faith supports her ability to forgive because it is a faith that promotes reparation, produces reformation, and procures restoration.

Through forgiveness, Collier exercises a faith that promotes reparation. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, wrote to the Roman church that "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word God" (Romans 10:17). A word is spoken, that word is heard, and the speaking and hearing bring faith about. Replace "faith" with "forgiveness," and we see that the two

operate identically. In her humanness, Collier may have thought and felt every fathomable thing contrary to the forgiveness she granted Roof; maybe she didn't. Maybe Roof expected to hear the weight of the world's anger and hatred. Perhaps he didn't. But forgiveness helps people take responsibility for their choices by making the burden bearable. Reparation becomes possible because the chance to atone exists. When one atones, one is "at one" with God, others, and self. Healing begins here, for the wrong and those wronged.

Collier's faith supports such forgiveness because it is a faith that produces reformation. One of the most significant demonstrations of love that humanity can express is forgiveness. Again, Paul writes in the book of Hebrews that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" and "without faith, it is impossible to please" God (Hebrews 11:1,6).

Replace "faith" with either "love" or "forgiveness," and again, we see that they operate identically. Faith requires forgiveness, forgiveness demonstrates love, and love produces change or reformation. As much as the Charleston Church shootings saddened and angered us, Collier's response, forgiveness, reverberated throughout the nation. Forgiveness has sparked a dialogue that focuses on national healing and change as we speak.

Finally, Collier's faith supports such forgiveness because it is a faith that procures restoration. People who are hurting often hurt other people. While some may never come to understand the kind of hurt that moves someone to shoot nine people in the house of God, Collier has experienced the power of forgiveness in her spiritual journey in such a way that allows her, mandates her, to extend that same forgiveness to others. To be clear, I don't believe that she excuses the crime. I do think, however, that faith empowers her to forgive the sin. How? For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God "(Romans 6:23)." Not every wrong deserves a conviction and prison sentence, but in God's eyes, we have all committed sins and need forgiveness. Forgiveness brings about reparation,

reformation, and restoration, which is why those who walk by faith acknowledge it for what it is. Faith requires, not requests, forgiveness. To abide in faith and right standing spiritually, we must abide in forgiveness. I know about the kind of faith in which Collier walks.

I have been on both the receiving and giving end of that kind of forgiveness. It's not something that happens overnight for some of us, and it did not happen that way for me. Regardless of what I thought and felt, faith required me to forgive those who wronged me and be glad that I did. Refusing to forgive could have easily left me angry, empty, bitter, and cold after being beaten, raped, and sodomized with a broken beer bottle when I was eighteen years old and six months pregnant with my son. The man left me for dead, and I nearly miscarried. But I chose to forgive the sin, not excuse the crime. Time healed my body, but forgiveness healed my soul and spirit. I know that faith and forgiveness repair, reform, and restores. May Collier and countless others who walk in faith and forgiveness continue to demonstrate that truth.

FAILURE BUILDS DREAMS

**Kenneth Foster Jr.#1451768,
State of Texas Mark W. Stiles Unit**

While in segregation, I've invested in magazines to keep me abreast of what's going on in the world. I'm a child of politics, and I love to learn about fashion, technology, new music, culture, and surging movements. I continue to find things that add another piece to my journey. Seekers find. It's like walking on a beach, a trail, a road, and you see something along the way. You find an interesting stone here; you find a jewel there, you witness a magnificent piece of nature in another place, and step by step, a puzzle comes together. Suddenly, the "bigger picture" shows itself.

I was reading an interview with William Shatner (of Star Trek fame). While I've never been a Star Trek fan, I have always respected Shatner's work. I first became fond of his comedy in the "Airplane" movies. Even at a young age, I had an eye for good comedy-Dan Aykroyd, Chevy Chase, Steve Martin, Martin Short. At 81 years old, Shatner is still on his grind and reminds me of James Brown, The Godfather of Soul, who was coined "The hardest working man in show biz." Maybe Shatner has taken that title, carrying out his one-man show on Broadway, "Shatner's World."

Shatner exudes wisdom. It's the calm, astonishing wisdom that comes with living and learning. He has found his peace and also his place in the world. He spoke of something that I've been going through recently, dealing with failure. Failure is something we all wrestle with. We also take failure in different ways. For some, it mortifies them. For others, it motivates them. For the last nine months, I have been trapped in the middle, embarrassed by my errors and inspired by them at the same time. I feel like one of those "soft crabs" from the Chesapeake area. As the water warms, the dormant crabs get the signal to move, and as they do, they molt their shells. This change, of course, makes them vulnerable. That's how I feel,

stuck between my old self and my new self. If I'm unable to move into the next stage safely, it could ultimately mean my demise. But I do want to go into my new self. I do want to embrace the new self I can be. It's a continual process.

What Shatner spoke on was a failure. But, what he said gave me hope about my situation. Shatner said, "I've formulated a theory: you have to fail continuously. You fail at something; then you get over it, then you fail some more. And after you fail, there's always something new there. And that something new can be exciting."

At first thought, it sounds like torture to fail repeatedly. Who wants to do that? But could it be the greatest thing ever? Failure may be the best ingredient of all because it's what makes us push onward. It's what makes us keep going for success. But, Shatner said, "success is never there. Success should always be just beyond your grasp." Again, that sounds like torture. You never grab Success?? Success is a tool by which we measure what we have accomplished, but it can also be a tool to recline. Some of us don't want to stop until we have left this world. Some of us never want to grasp that "thing" and call it a day. To grasp that "thing" is to say, Ah, yes, I've done it. I'm good now. Shatner is 81 years old, and he's still going. At 91, when he perhaps can't do this show, his legacy of work will live on to keep pushing what he said to the world. We should work to live, not live to work.

But, what of the good from this failure thing? What's this? "After you fail, there's always something there?"

When I fail, I feel as if I'm hurting someone or falling short on a promise. And perhaps I have. But the ultimate wound is when there is no attempt to correct it. When the error or mistake is accepted, that is the worse wound because we will fail. To fail is not to lose (which is to suffer a defeat). A failure is a temporary roadblock, which can be extended. To say, "It's not what happens to you, but what you do about it" may sound cliché, but it's true. When you keep going, that's where that something new comes into place. That something new is that piece you have extended. That is where I'm at with

myself right now. I am trying to get over my failure and find something new. I must.

At this point in my life, to accept failure is like climbing Mount Everest. I'm halfway, get discouraged and decide to turn back. The trip back down is just as treacherous and dangerous and may end up being death (just as continuing up), but it would be death alongside a loss, quitting, conceding. To keep going up may lead to death, too, but it does so with a win if I reach the top. Winning and dying is preferable to being a quitter and dying any day. I've decided to "keep on pushing" because life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself, failure, and all.

Failure. Yeah. The greatest thing ever!

YOU MUST CHANGE THE GUARD CULTURE

Timothy J. Muise #W66927 (Released)
Massachusetts Correctional Institution – Shirley

One thing that 200 plus years of American corrections has taught us is that the "jailer" will never play an influential role in the rehabilitation of the "jailed." It is just the nature of the relationship. To keep men, human beings, in a cage day in and day out, you tend to lift yourself above them, putting them down, keeping them in their place. Before you realize it, you are dehumanizing them, which helps to justify ill-treatment. I am not Sigmund Freud or Carl Jung, but I know this simple psychology piece firsthand.

Former Massachusetts Governor William Weld was quoted for extremely damaging remarks he made. Mr. Weld stated, "I will return the prisoners of Massachusetts to the joy of breaking rocks. I will send them on tours through the circles of hell." Many remember these remarks, especially the old guard department of corrections' employees who still hold onto that flawed philosophy, but few know who his listeners were. He made those remarks before a gathering of Attorneys General of the United States gathered in Washington, DC. Not one of these "top cops" questioned then-Governor Weld about the law in his state, Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 124, ss. 1(e), which states that the Commissioner of Corrections (the "top jailer") must provide programs of rehabilitation and education. The law of the land in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts states that prisoners must be offered an opportunity to rehabilitate. Governor Weld ignored that law, a treasonous act, and the sycophant "tough on crime top cops" dared not challenge the Fuhrer.

The Weld Era supposed "tough on crime" breaking rocks madness brought us from an approximate 24% recidivism rate to an almost doubled 47% rate. This draconian view of corrections made it so that one in two prisoners returned to prison within five years of release. Even more tragic was that

corrections did this with the highest staffing ratio in the nation (2.2 prisoners for every one staffer) and the third highest-paid guards in the country. Failure at an exorbitant cost, but no cost has been more severe than that which has been burdened upon society.

The Massachusetts taxpayer pays top dollar for unsafe streets and untold future social ills, the likes of which we can only envision in our nightmares.

The opioid crisis is part of this failure, as is the rash of teenage pregnancy and youth violence. Our children are born into a world of peril, manifest by the prison industrial complex's negative injection of hopelessness into our punitive, capitalistic society. The abusive guard culture flourished under this failed system. It is time to make a change. Hope must be allowed to replace hopelessness.

Please help us to force the Massachusetts Legislature to write into law a Citizen's Advisory Committee which has real power to force the Department of Corrections to rehabilitate, in line with the law. They must send the dinosaur employees of the "breaking rocks" era packing if they are not willing to change.

TOOLS FOR CHANGE REASONS FOR HOPE

**Gary Field #M05398
Okeechobee Correctional Institution**

You know, nobody wakes up and says, "Hey, I want to get shot. I think I'll O.D. and flatline. Wouldn't it be great if I could pick up a mandatory 20-year prison sentence?"

Nobody wakes up one day and says, "I want to be an alcoholic, an addict, or sit around in a circle of convicted felons and share the horror stories that we've stitched together into what passes for life behind the wire.

Scripture tells us that there is a way that seems right unto man, but the way thereof leads to death. So, only a fool would wake up one day and say, "I want to set in motion a chain of events that will lead me into the valley of the shadow of death? So, how is it that so many of us find ourselves in the valley?

How often do we have to hear a gravel fall or a holding cell door slam before we begin to see a pattern forming? In the same way that it doesn't take all day to recognize sunshine, it should not be that hard to figure out that we're walking in darkness, playing in the shadows, or following a false light.

Fortunately, there's a way to stop the madness before you hit that point of no return – before "catch an elbow" or fall into a custom-made hole in the ground. The beautiful thing about the T.C. If we choose to realize it, it can provide us with the tools we need to start taking control of our lives.

Although we have a room full of graduates, it is my prayer that many of you have picked up some tools to start making positive changes in your life.

1. I'd like to share a few things I have learned on my journey through the therapeutic community: When all you have in your toolbox is a hammer, every problem seems like a nail. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is based upon the premise that to change one's behavior, it is necessary to change one's thinking. Understanding that concept enables us to begin reevaluating

the thoughts and beliefs behind many of our self-destructive actions.

2. We are where we are today because of decisions we have made, so why not ask ourselves what kind of things we can begin doing today that will better tomorrow?

3. I've learned the difference between reacting and responding. If you go to the doctor and she says that you're having a "reaction" to medication, that may be a bad thing. If she says, you are "responding," that may be a good thing. It is from our ability to respond that we get the word "responsibility." When we begin taking responsibility for our actions, we start taking control of our lives.

4. I've learned that it's not just about me! Whenever I'd drop the ball and make a mess out of my life, I would throw myself a little pity party: "Why me?" I'd moan.

I had some "growing up" to do before I realized that by the time the "gavel fell" or the cell door slammed, I had left a path of destruction - friends, family, loved ones; they all got swept up into the consequences of my bad decisions. Like a bull in a China shop, I had broken quite a few cups.

5. I've learned that I can't control my destiny. I can't prevent what might be happening five, ten, or fifteen years from now. I can only control myself, and that "one at a time." But each "act" becomes a brick, and it's with those bricks that I'll begin to lay the path that leads to that destiny. Each "act" is a brick in the foundation upon which my life will rise or fall.

A thought precedes each "action," so let's begin to think clearly. Choose carefully and ACT wisely. T.C. did not provide us with a magic wand, but it allowed us to start taking control of our lives and the tools to do so.

I began by saying that nobody wakes up one day and says, "Hey, I want to get shot. I think I'll O.D. and flatline. Wouldn't it be great if I could pick up a mandatory 20-year prison sentence?" But we can all wake up tomorrow and say, "I've graduated from the T.C. program! I may not yet be where I want to be, but at least I'm not where I was."

It is what it is! True. But it will be what I make it

COP CULTURE

J. Bauhaus #88367
Lawton Correction Facility

One of the hardest things to do is sit quietly and watch while America's elite turn the place of freedom into a fascist, military cop-ocracy, and trick the public into thinking it is good for them. "We're keeping you safe!" the cops plead, as their fellow cops are daily caught on videos choking people to death with outlawed military strangulation techniques, planting guns and knives on corpses they just murdered, perpetrating street executions, gang-beatings, and torture-sessions for "confessions." These citizens-made videos prove that cops are more like packs of rabid mongrel dogs than what used to pass for police. Their "making us safe!" nonsense is repeated by the media, over and over, as if this slogan is a pill that will put us back to sleep and give us pleasant dreams to erase the videos they reluctantly show. These same "news" reporters act as high-kicking cheerleaders shouting "hero! hero," highlighting editor-ordered, stories of cops rescuing animals, children and the unfortunate during their side-jobs of assisting paramedics, firemen and hospital personnel during floods, tornadoes, and other disasters.

Because most of their job, after collecting road tax and car fees, is beating people down, hogtying them, then abducting them to live in cages. Cops and their media pals create feel good "news" about cop heroics; we are bombarded 24/7 with Hollywood and TV cop-glorification shows.

Thanks to our politicians who have us all working for the middle east, our last few decades have been a series of disasters, costing billions of dollars and thousands of lives. We propped up dictators and puppet governments and fought other people's wars. We made millions of enemies, which our fool politicians call "terrorists" to conceal the fact that they have gotten us trapped in a never-ending guerrilla war. Now most

of their riches come from kickbacks from exporting munitions. Sonny to Bush (Cheney) taught us that wars equal profits. Each one of our politicians has a mass-murder factory in his district, from which flows both fat profits and jobs. Endless war is here to stay. In the good old days, before all those “Dizzy Storms: and “Dizzy Shields,” citizens used to be able to drive for blocks and blocks before seeing a cop. Now, thanks to all these wars, we had to find high-pay jobs for all the soldiers. They were given cop jobs and allowed to attack citizens for their pay, the same way that medical bandits road blocked travelers and demanded tolls, fees, and tribute to get past these highway robbers.

The simple math is, the more wars, the more cops that citizens must support. Our elite elected robber barons excuse this by having their media propagandists honk their “crime! crime! crime! horns 24/7. The gullible public believes everything the cops tell is about the crime rate, even though we are never shown any proof that crime increased. Nothing the cops say about crime is scientific; nothing that the cops say about crime can be independently verified. We are up to our eyes in cops: regular cops, secret cops, aircops, security cops, prison cops. Everywhere something might be stolen, or a fight could start, we’ve got a swarm of cops waiting to fill these niches.

Our politicians trump-up wars for profit and to rob nations, same as street thugs rat-pack unwary citizens. Each war that the politicians decide to start requires them to train more citizens to be psychopaths, to pull triggers, lob grenades, drop bombs, shoot missiles, and fly drones. The politicians’ trend toward getting rich from perpetual warfare is turning us into a psychopathic nation. The mere excuse of “crime!” is not enough to feed our millions of cops. Now they feed this vast over bloat of excess cops by having their media shriek “Terror!” 24/7. The actual threat of injury or death through “terrorism” (guerrilla counterattack) is miniscule. The risk of citizens suffering serious crime is also exceedingly small.

Their crime excuse for their 35-year explosion of cops, lawyers and corporate prisons has been wearing thin for a long time. Their endless terror war is finally making smarter citizens wake up and take notice. England just released a report on how their politicians lied them into our phony war on Iraq. Sonny Bush (Cheney)'s crimes against humanity are finally becoming common knowledge worldwide. So, we get to help keep the slower apes deluded? CNN, Hollywood, and politician Mike Rodgers begin selling us lurid "Tales of our secret cops!" and other propaganda pieces designed to convince us that Supercop's' Captain Americas have saved our world from countless catastrophes. Meanwhile, the actual threats to us are our inability to get on a plane without first being sexually molested by a cop, and our inability to go about our lives without being fed upon by hordes of other cops.

The cops in Baton Rouge and Minneapolis got caught on video flat out murdering two black men. The cops are also psychotic, even murdering each other! (Eight navy seals were drowned in "training," and the reporter said that this is more of them than were killed in attacking the politicians' "enemies" (targets). Yes, we are pretty safe from crime and "terror", but not all that safe from our cops! Especially if you're a minority. The cops are eating us alive, and the Muslims are winning, since every day we have to suffer the same as prisoners do in their cages: we have to strip naked or be searched to prove we are innocent of carrying weapons that the cops can go hysterical about (The cop who murdered the Black Guy in Minneapolis acted like he was having a bad trip on acid) We have to prove to the cops that we don't have drugs. If (when) the cops think they saw something, everyone in the vicinity must be mass-punished until the cops are finished being scared. We must explain, over and over to the cops every detail of what we are doing any time they decide to get suspicious. Cops are trained to be paranoid schizophrenics, and they are allowed to commit any hideous crime against their targets and be rewarded for it with paid vacations.

So, welcome to prison or even death for your blazing incompetence. You let government run amok!

SLENDERMN JUSTICE PART 1

**Josh Shadduck #332317
Wisconsin Correctional Institution**

How can we call ourselves an advanced nation and still believe the only answer, in this case, is to send these two little girls to prison for decades? According to the assigned judge, Michael Bohren, the critical key in his decision to keep the girls in adult court is what will happen to them when they turn eighteen. That explains why he's dismissed arguments from lawyers to amend the charge to 2nd degree attempted homicide, which matches the elements in this case. He doesn't seem concerned with pursuing any alternative.

If Morgan and Anissa are tried and found guilty, the court will send them to Copper Lake, the state's youth prison for girls, until they turn twenty-five. They'll spend thirteen of their most formative years behind bars. I've met grown men in state prison serving less for murder. Presumably, the girls would have better access to the special treatment and counseling they need, but given recent events surrounding the juvenile facility, that's unlikely.

If the girls remain in adult court, they face up to sixty-five years in prison and, if Judge Bohren isn't satisfied with sending them away for thirteen years, then you can expect the punishment he plans to hand out will be much more severe.

If that proves to be the case, Morgan and Anissa will go to the youth prison until they turn eighteen, then be transferred to Taycheedah Correctional Institution in Fond du Lac, the state's maximum-security prison for women. Unfortunately, due to short staffing, overcrowding, and underfunding, it's almost guaranteed their mental health concerns will be neglected.

There's no doubt something needs to be done in this case. Morgan and Anissa need to be separated from society and the negative influences that led to one of the nation's most tragic events: they need time to grow up and overcome the demons

that haunt them. But, whatever the outcome, they'll have to live with what they've done for the rest of their lives.

Sadly, the choices placed before the girls by the current criminal justice system fail at their most fundamental level. The future of these girls is uncertain; whether they're tried as adults or juveniles, they will go to Cooper Lake youth prison in Irma, Wisconsin, a facility that is now under state and federal investigation. Allegations of sexual assault, child abuse, neglect, and various other corruption charges have the entire department of corrections under scrutiny.

So why hasn't the judge pushed for the most obvious alternative, to place those girls in the care of the state's secured mental health facility? If ever there was a need to place an alleged offender under the supervision of mental health specialists, these girls fit the bill. Sure, they've undergone evaluation, yet no real treatment. If they're sent to prison instead, they'll be placed on medication like everyone else, then forgotten. We can only hope they don't come out even worse.

How, in good conscience, can we treat the mentally ill children of our society this way, no better than the adults who make lifelong careers out of crime? These are children who are delusional and committed their act before they were even teenagers?

If the state provides Morgan and Anissa the right help, it's unlikely that they'll repeat their actions. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, crimes of this nature have the lowest recidivism rate.

We need to come together and do better. Sending these girls to Copper Lake, then to prison, would be tragic. I am not surprised that the youth prison has finally come under investigation. When the state sent me there in 1997, it was horrible, but overcrowding and strict policy changes have worsened in recent years. Wisconsin shut down all other juvenile facilities and housed both boys and girls in one single compound in 2011. Even with the decreasing number of juvenile arrests over the last several years (from 74,856 in

2010 to 57,086 in 2013), the facility must still be overcrowded. In 1997 more than half the rooms were occupied by a single resident; today the case is much different.

Now consider what these two young, mentally, and emotionally vulnerable girls face when they arrive at such a facility, abuse, neglect, and assault? The notion isn't just a possibility but an inevitable conclusion. Girls suffer neglect at the North Woods prison, especially when it comes to mental health treatment. Many suicide attempts have occurred in recent years.

According to an article found in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, a visitor saw such an event take place. She was visiting her granddaughter in a segregation unit at the facility and watched as another young girl met with what appeared to be a psychiatrist. The girl was crying and distraught.

"She was in distress. She was overwhelmed. The girl needed help," the woman said. But, instead of getting help, the girl was dismissed and sent back to her room. A few minutes later, the woman reported, the girl began choking and gagging loudly.

"Grandma, do you hear that?" the woman's granddaughter remarked. "Someone's trying to commit suicide." As traumatizing as that is, it's not a sound a person will forget easily. Several minutes passed with no reaction from the staff. Finally, the woman grew hysterical and alerted the guards, but according to her, they took at least five minutes to respond and remove the girl from her room. She was lucky the woman was there to witness what was taking place. The outcome could have been much worse. Records show that the suicide rate in Wisconsin prisons is higher than the national average, especially in solitary confinement.

Suicide attempts at Copper Lake aren't that uncommon either. According to interviews with staff members and public records found at the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office, at least two different girls have been taken out of the facility since 2011 and brought to the hospital after hanging themselves and losing consciousness. Many suicide attempts occurred after

Governor Scott Walker declared the facility safe following policy changes last December. November 9, 2015, medical responders shocked a girl with a defibrillator to restart her heart. December 15, 2015, a fifteen-year-old girl was found unconscious in her cell just hours after authorities raided the facility. The girl told the responding staff she not only hung herself but took a handful of pills as well. February 16, 2016, a girl had to be cut down after she fastened a noose around her neck and tried to hang herself.

Wisconsin has a serious problem when it comes to the treatment of juvenile offenders. Something unbearable is pushing these girls to the extreme edge, and society's indifference is heartbreaking. I can't begin to express the sorrow I feel having experienced up close what these girls and boys are trying to cope with. I know how hopeless and desperate life becomes when you're hidden away from the world. I've watched grown men break under the same pressure these children face; death becomes the only means of escape for too many.

WHERE IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

Daniel Gwynn #CW5179
SCI – Greene

I was reading an article in the Prison Legal News about how Chicago police corruption, and the concealment of exculpatory evidence by the DA's office led to Jermaine Walker spending ten years of his life in an Illinois prison for something he didn't do. He was convicted and sentenced to 22 years for drug possession with intent to deliver within 1,000 ft of a school. The conviction was reversed because the transaction the arresting officers attested to was not on video footage of the scene they claimed. The prosecutor was found complicit in helping the officers manufacture this evidence. Jermaine Walker was exonerated, but the corruption of these officials stole ten years of his life. He was released on March 25, 2016.

What's so crazy is that the police officers and prosecutor that manufactured and hid evidence still have their jobs. No one was punished or sanctioned. These public officials broke the law. The police and prosecutors are supposed to be held to a higher standard because they are entrusted with the crest of society's moral standard and empowered to serve and protect society's virtue. So why aren't the injustices perpetrated by these trusted officials punished and the public more outraged over the act and inaction? Well, prosecutors seldom face discipline for their misconduct. Courts have a strong tendency to view such misconduct as a "harmless error" and rarely reverse convictions on that ground.

Governmental misconduct was a contributing factor in 46 of the first 273 DNA exonerations nationally. In 2011, the Commonwealth suppressed exculpatory evidence in Mr. Dennis' case, where witnesses provided information that could impeach the Commonwealth's witnesses. Also, in Seifullah Abdul-Salaam, the Commonwealth failed to disclose DNA

evidence. I've found 240 cases where the prosecutor withheld exculpatory evidence in this State alone. These prosecutors walk into a courtroom and paint the vilest pictures of defendants to win a conviction knowing that the defendant is innocent. Then 10-20 years later, come to find the prosecutor hid evidence to win that conviction and never receives any punishment. Where's the justice in that?

MICAH JOHNSON: COWARD OR MARTYR

Previously Incarcerated Contributor

Protests are a peaceful way to make huge statements. But on July 7, 2016, a Dallas protest against police brutality turned unexpectedly violent. A sniper opened fire on the crowd killing five officers and wounding civilians. That sniper was Micah Johnson, a black man who was so outraged by the racially charged killings in America that he took justice into his own hands. Like Gavin Long, who would commit a similar shooting days later in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Johnson paid the ultimate price with his life, leaving behind many questions without clear answers. The biggest question among them was about Johnson's identity. Was he a coward with a gun or a martyr for a bigger cause?

Micah Johnson was a troubled man who matched the profile of the kind of person who could commit such a heinous crime. He enlisted in the Army Reserve in 2009. During a tour in Afghanistan, a female soldier in his unit accused him of sexual harassment. He waived his right to a hearing to receive a lesser punishment for the alleged crime and was discharged in 2014.

Once he was back home, neighbors recall seeing him practice military exercises in his backyard. He kept a journal detailing explicit sniper strategies to take down targets and confuse enemies. He spent a great deal of time at a local gym known for self-defense and personal protection. He was also a fan of anti-police groups and was labeled "unstable" by black militant groups after learning of his discharge conditions from the Army.

Several reports allege that Johnson intended to single out white officers only, though that was not the case. While many questions remain unanswered, what's clear is that Micah Johnson was a man fueled by anger and instability who had nowhere to turn. The family around him had no recollection of odd behavior. To them, he was the same guy he'd always

been. But secretly, behind closed doors, he was seeking to find his identity. His opportunity to succeed in the Army squandered, and, because of his past, he was unable to build a new life as a black militant. So he acted on his own and paved his path. Unfortunately, it was a path that led to tragedy for him as well as several innocent people.

Was Micah Johnson a coward? If he were a mentally stable person, the answer would be yes. But this man needed help that he did not receive. Was he a martyr? Perhaps, but not for the black community and not for police relations with that community. If anything, he was a martyr for mental health complications and a worst-case scenario of what can go wrong when conditions go undiagnosed when soldiers come home from war without the tools to start over.

Johnson was another troubled man who resorted to violence as a cry for help. But, unfortunately, it's a cry that no one will be able to hear.

PRISONERS AS EXPERTS

**Timothy J. Muise (Released) #W66927
Massachusetts Correctional Institution – Shirley**

When it comes to post-release statistics for ex-prisoners, the figures paint a grim picture. In 2014, the Bureau of Justice Statistics released a comprehensive study in which 68% of prisoners released across 30 states were arrested for new crimes within three years. The current recidivism rate for the US stands at 60%. Many ex-felons find themselves going down the same roads shortly after regaining freedom.

Studies have found that proper post-release care can reduce recidivism by up to 80%. And, surely, past and present inmates could offer a window into the transition process. But it seems no one in America is ready to listen to them.

Take Mike Shank, for instance. Shank was a junior at East Carolina University when he was caught in a cocaine bust and received a prison sentence. In a June 25th article with The News & Observer, Shank reveals he felt like the words ‘ex-con’ were written on his forehead upon his release. Like many ex-felons, he faced difficulty assimilating back into public life and finding work.

Instead of giving up, he created a nonprofit program called Pardoned by Christ. Through the organization, Shank provides housing and support for newly released inmates who are working their way back into society.

Participants in Pardoned by Christ avoid the typical pitfalls of post-prison life. They find regular work, avoid drugs, and most importantly, stay free of new crimes. The program works, not simply because it’s a nice thing to do. It’s because Shank himself was a prisoner. He was once in the same shoes as the very men he’s helping. He understands their plight and has tailored his organization to meet their specific needs. With such a successful program like this, it seems strange that the government isn’t leaning more on imprisoned men and women to create solid pre-and post-release programs.

Pardoned by Christ isn't the only post-release program out there. For example, Sanctified Hope Home for Women in Weatherford, Texas, provides the same type of assistance.

The Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP) teaches ex-felons business skills before they're released. PEP boasts a 7% recidivism rate; most of its members found jobs after release. This program has produced results far below the national recidivism average.

What programs like PEP, Pardoned by Christ, and Sanctified Hope Home for Women indicate is that pre-and post-release assistance is necessary to leave a life of crime behind. The prisoners themselves are the ones who know what they need, especially those who've been released. Finding steady employment is one of the biggest challenges. In a 2014 article from WBHM, ex-offender Melinda Ricketts detailed how she turned down for jobs because of her criminal record. Fed up, she created A Cut Above The Rest Lawn Service and made it a point to hire other ex-offenders. A person who has fallen victim to the hardships of post-prison life understands what is needed to move forward. But these programs should not be born out of frustration or post-release injustice. The government needs to reevaluate the treatment of prisoners and use their insights to change the narrative.

THE IMPACT OF PRISON MINISTRY

Previously Incarcerated Contributor

In recent years, I have been encouraged to respond to the call to serve through Prison Ministries. As a Justice provider, I found myself all too often observing a broken system, and I could not morally justify my ability to enforce Justice, knowing the current state of affairs. As I grew in ministry, I found others concerned and interested in seeking ways to be involved in prison ministries. There are five significant points of interaction in this calling: the offender, the volunteer, the offender's family, the correctional officer, and the chaplains and ministers themselves. Oddly, the victims of the alleged crimes are often left out of the recovery process. Restorative Justice models seek to bridge this gap in the future, and many are already doing so in juvenile and family courts.

Prison Ministry is quite the unique calling, and not for everyone. It is a ministry of careful listening and compassionate healing. The church and community can provide channels for communication, motivated by a love for the hurting, those who often are dysfunctional and often rebellious. We are not there to judge but rather be a conduit for God's love, to be a messenger of transformation to those who have been or feel forgotten, tossed away, and worthless. Formerly Incarcerated Persons (F.I.P.S.) need that love both before and after release. The Justice system intended to help restore the person to their fullest integrity, not be punitive and exploitative as the system has now become. I recall walking out with an inmate one time as he was being released; there was so much hate on the officers' faces. I distinctly remember one even saying to the inmate, "we'll see you soon, you all come back, you'll be back, I promise." (By the way, that inmate has never been rearrested, let alone locked up, and that was almost ten years ago).

The following five categories are the primary areas of service that we find in Prison Ministries:

Church and Bible Study services for incarcerated persons
Pen Pal and Visitor programs for incarcerated persons and their families or church communities
Family Ministries for the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individual's families
Educational Programs and Life Skills workshops
Pre and Post-release support – this is the primary point of service due to the vulnerable nature of release and living back in the world after such a traumatic event.

People often wonder what types of skills are needed or required to provide quality, impactful ministry. We like to say, come as yourself and let the Love of God flow through you. Many are afraid that working in prisons and with prisoners directly is dangerous, but it is quite the opposite. Very few ministers or volunteers ever encounter any dangerous situations. On the contrary, the inmates and the facility staff all anticipate and look forward to the community volunteers and minister's presence.

I tell newcomers that the most important quality for ministering to the incarcerated besides an open heart is a deep dedication and sincerity towards the work. Many times, especially in zones where inmates are exploited, there are very few tools available for ministers to be trained. Some churches run prison ministry training courses, and some seminaries offer ministerial training for ministers and chaplains, but it is not a widely chosen avenue for most. This ministry is a hands-on learning and that can be intimidating to many, but this is because of the unique nature of the needs of those being ministered to. No two instances are alike, and only knowledge of the Gospel, combined with an open heart, can truly provide a successful venture into the world of prison ministries.

With the desperate need for effective evangelism in our prison system today, it is no wonder the world is beginning to look deeper into the topic of Prison Ministry. With a greater world population, and a greater level of communication, our prison population has grown to heights never seen. This is the

bad news, but the good news is that we have a captive audience. Only pastors have such an opportunity outside of the walls of the prison. In prison, there are few distractions, and due to the level of isolation, a greater level of introspection and contemplation is present. That is the beauty of Prison Ministry – the ability to plant, water, and grow the seeds of life; the field needs its caretakers.

One of the challenges of administering Prison Ministries is funding. The needs are significant, and one of the most important items inmates need are reading materials: bibles, adult study courses, reference books, writing materials for notes and correspondence, and study tools. Another problem found throughout the system is that ministries often focus on how many conversions can be made rather than continuing the development of those who have become Christians or asked for help. Hence, the usage of resources drastically increases, making it even harder to meet everyone's needs.

Donating funds to Prison Ministry is the primary way the community can assist in recovery and reconciliation. It ultimately is the community's responsibility to recover any individual they deem suitable to be temporarily removed, and hence we become the emissaries of the community. What we can or cannot do directly reflects the health of the community. Salvation is a process, and every point of the process has specific needs, and without the support of the community, it becomes taxing. It drains the ministers, chaplains, volunteers, and many officers.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH / BLACK LIVES MATTER

**Charles Mamou #999333
State of Texas Polunsky Unit**

For most, Black History Month is a time for school plays where cute little school kids in old costumes reenact the historical lives and struggles of equality made by black leaders and Civil rights activities through the years. We'll all have our favorites, from a snazzy dressed philosophical orator like Dr. Martin L. King. Or the cute, polite lady who refused to give up her seat after a long day of work, we'll salute Mrs. Rosa Parks and those bunions that prevented her from getting up that day. Or maybe you like the all-natural, afro puff sista that Angela Davis epitomized, at a time when black women needed a strong feminist that would become their she-ro. Or perhaps you're one of the millions who will pass the blunt and 40 ounce of beer around with the homies and homegirls—being cool. Fellas sporting a fresh fade and edge-up. Ladies got their hair done, long eyelashes taped on, make-up tight, and so forth. All to attend one of the hundreds of black-themed parades in the city near you? Glad to enjoy a free day off work. Or a legitimate excuse to party without a care one.

Is this all there is to Black History Month? Folks in Baltimore, Ferguson, Cleveland, and other 'mindful' cities across America will be marching with glorified chants of black lives matter to curb the violence inflicted upon unarmed blacks. Some may argue that black men and women were targeted just for being 'black.' Think about that for a second because those people you see in the newspapers and on T.V. screaming from the top of their lungs with tears, rage, and overwhelming passion are making history....

Black History, right before our eyes. Before there was a Freddie Gray, there was a Larry Payne. Before Trayvon Martin, there was Emmet Till, where Mamie Till led her version of black lives matter, and added fuel to the activists'

fire. Before there was Michael Brown and Aiyana Jones, there was Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith.

Henry Highland Garnet led the way for Malcolm X to exist and co-exist within that militant setting. P.B.S. Pinchbeck and Robert Carlos DE Large were political powerhouses before President Barack Obama ever was. Before there was a Kirk Franklin and The Family, there was the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the cool and charming Thomas A. Dorsey. Before Rosa Parks, Ida B. Wells, a gun-toting feminist and Black Nationalist, cute as a button and stubborn as a mule. She took no shit.

All your heart problem survivors can thank Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, who in 1893 performed the first open-heart operation, which became a patent staple for all doctors to follow for many years. Millions of black ancestors paved the way for present-day blacks and poor minorities to have a clear say in all matters with a ballot.

I could spend my time telling you about William Edward Burkhardt Du Bois, Charlotte Spears Bass, John M. Langton, Benjamin Lundy, Sojourner Truth, or some of the thousand or so black leaders that I have impregnated into my brain with sheer admiration. Instead, I want you to see an iconic photo through my eyes that awakened me to the whole #blacklives-matter movement. This photo isn't as famous as those showing police releasing attack dogs on defenseless black marchers. Nor the charred remains of the Freedom Riders bus. No, this photo was taken in Memphis in a 1968 protest that led to a Martial Law lockdown on the city, ignored by protestors who were tired of being sick and tired. Look beyond the sea of white officers madly swinging their batons onto the bruised and broken bodies of blacks who sought equality and racial justice. Pay attention instead to the black man leaning up against a light pole in the thick of this one-sided assault, and there you'll see a one-legged amputee who didn't allow his disability to hinder his voice or participation in the march. That's what is inspiring to me. That this man, who only had one leg, stood taller than anyone else because he didn't make

excuses when he could have very well been excused. He understood that his struggle was for others that would come, that he would never meet nor know. He was there to show his black lives matter stance and, if he can do it, I know damn well you can, too. We all can.

Black History month, to me, is more about the knowledge of M.E. than any knowledge of past honored and fallen heroes. I say that you demonstrate that black lives matter when you realize that you matter, when you learn to fully love yourself and others, respecting your fellow brothers and sisters, and not harming them because of stupid shit like accidentally stepping on your new Air Jordan's. Black History should be about you being a part of a movement for the greater good. Power for the people is the power to the people. Black lives matter is history in the making. It is Beautiful.

Now to those who would argue, "Man, you just talking that prison talk. You not in the struggle, getting chased by the police, hustling to feed your family to get by another day." I won't even try to argue nor oppose their thoughts. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, which I strongly encourage. However, I can speak on it because when I was free, I was a part of the problem. I was in the "hoods" drinking and partying, with no rational reasoning behind it or plans for the future. I was uneducated and oblivious to the plight of our black ancestors. When I came to prison and began to read history, the real history, and not the rated G bullshit they teach our children in school that put America in a favorable light, I was outraged, angry at myself that I had never stopped to obtain this information when I was free. I knew I was Black, but I wasn't aware of how proud I should have been. The price that blacks paid for over two hundred years is too priceless to comprehend. Why would anyone abuse that gift, the sacrifices they made? Black men, women, and children gave their lives so we (at present) could enjoy equality, dignity, and opportunity in this nation.

Indeed, we've come a long way, from the outhouse to the white house, building this nation from the ground up. Let's

stop killing our own and hope that others will see that we care about 'us.' Let's learn to love one another. It's what brought us out of the wilderness into the fields of dreams that do come true. When you chant "black lives matter," hug a brother or sister. Walk in the truth of your words. Become a part of Black History for every month of the year.

BOOK SUMMARY AND CONCLUSTION (pending)

INDEX OF AUTHORS (Pending)

NIPSEY HUSSLE: A LEGACY FULFILLED

**Marshall Jones #366231
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Black Men are dying. Young Black Men are dying, far before their time and in numbers that seem unfathomable. It's gotten to a point where a homicide is covered with the same tone by reporters as a story about a felled tree blocking a road. I'm sure it's not because they don't care about the demise of Black Men nationwide, but I am certain that it happens so often that Americans have become desensitized by it.

We're living in a world where celebrities aren't exempt from the horrors of homicides. We've lost more Black celebrities than we can count, and nothing resembling change has presented itself as being close enough to grasp. On March 31, 2019, Nipsey Hussle became numbered with the fallen after being gunned down in front of his store. A Granny-nomination album, Victory Lap, a spread in GQ alongside his fiancée Lauren London, his numerous business interests employing countless people in South Central L.A. not enough to stop gun violence from taking his life. A tragic story. Another Black Man perishes before he can fully realize his potential. A role model. A father. A Black Man. A human being.

In the wake of Nipsey Hussle's demise, an outpouring of love and support made it evident that Nipsey was no ordinary man. He emerged from the vices of gang activity to not only become a success, but also an advocate for social change within his community. People far and wide have been touched by his life and reach, some even starting crowdfunding campaigns to ensure his children would be taken care of after his death.

Nipsey Hussle's family, while extremely appreciative, declined all monies, citing that Nipsey's incredible fiscal

responsibility would guarantee his family the same comforts they're always known. Only someone beyond their years would secure the futures of their children and family at an age where most are finally settling into their careers. A testament that Nipsey was anything but ordinary.

While it's extremely noteworthy that Nipsey has accomplished what all people desire, leave a lasting-legacy behind for our children, it stings to know that Nipsey lived knowing his day could come. He was never naïve to the dangers of his community or the possibility that the community he so desperately tried to change would claim his life.

What type of world do we live in where 30-year-olds accept death as an inevitable reality? How does life become finite for someone who has only begun to see the fruit of his labor? How does one abandon the "untouchable" mentality young men, especially Black Men, have toward both life and death to secure the futures of those they'll leave behind? When I was shot multiple times in 2001, I wouldn't have left behind a pair of socks, let alone trust funds, businesses, and the financial portfolio of a 60-year-old. A couple hundred dollars in my pocket, a new pair of Air Force 1's and the blunt I would've smoked had I not been gunned down. Some legacy, huh?

Nipsey's children will be wealthy, and they'll be able to have whatever they desire. I can't help but to shake my head as I think about what his kids will never experience, what they will never have, what they'll only hear about their father in stories. They won't have their father to teach them how to persevere in the face of struggle, how to handle themselves when a door closes, things a man can pass to his children are his identity and his testimony but cut short by a tragedy that shouldn't have happened. I pray that whatever he was able to impart in the time he was afforded is substantive enough to equip his kids for the unexplainable: that even the good can die young. Black Men are dying. Young Black Men are dying. Does their impact die with them?

IS DONALD TRUMP A RACIST?

Jeremy Busby #881193
Mark Stiles Unit

I am the least racist person there is anywhere in the world,” President Donald Trump said recently from the white house. Trump has come under intense fire. After a near-month long fight with some of his opponents that many has classified as “RACIST.”

A recent poll by Quinnipiac University revealed that for the first-time during Trump’s presidency, most American voters believe Trump is a racist. Fifty-one percent of voters believe that Trump is a racist, while 45% of those polled felt he was not.

Accusations of racism are not new to Trump, however his recent racially polarizing shots at his opponents has renewed those accusations.

Trump first launched a vicious attack on twitter against the “squad,” a group of four congress women of color. In his tweets, Trump told the lawmakers to “Go back to the crime infested places from which they came.”

Shortly afterwards, Trump expanded his attacks to black congressman Elijah Cummings, D-Md. and his districts, the majority black city of Baltimore.

Trump labeled Baltimore A “disgusting, rat and rodent infected mess” where “no human being would want to live.” He told Cummings, who is the chairman of the oversight committee investigating Trump’s affairs, that he should return to his district and provide some “oversight” there.

In the Quinnipiac Poll, 59% of woman said Trump was a racist, that was compared to only 45% of men who thought Trump was a racist. Nearly 91% of all republicans said Trump was not a racist, while 86% of democrats said he was.

Independent voters were nearly split, 56% of them thought Trump was a racist.

The poll also dealt with policy and the current tone of politics. When asked about the lack of civility in politics, 88% of American votes said there was a lack of civility. Forty-five percent of those polled blame that lack of civility on Trump.

BOOK SUMMARY AND CONCLUSTION (pending)

INDEX OF AUTHORS (Pending)

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