

STATEVILLE SPEAKS

Voices from the Inside • Winter 2014

STOP THE CYCLE

By Shawnette Green

THERE IS NO SINGLE, SIMPLE ANSWER TO SUCH a daunting task; the task of finding a solution to America's disproportionately high prison population. And while many of our nation's citizens are oblivious, this epidemic is systemic. The work necessary to curb the effects of this dilemma must be delegated to three primary entities: nation, family, individual.

First, our nation must be willing to revisit and dissect its history and origins which revealed the root cause of a great many of America's cancerous dysfunctions. This nation was built upon the misguided notion that particular people are superior and entitled to privilege, or any and all others are used and or misused to acquire and retain those privileges and entitlements.

In our present day, this nation too often turns a blind eye to the vast contrast between the affluent and the poverty-stricken. The percentage of American citizens living below the poverty line is enormous and increasing. Economic studies show that income inequality in the United States is so great that it more closely resembles the inequity of a Third World country than that of an advanced industrial nation.

There is no coincidence that prisons filled far beyond capacity, for the most part, are people who suffer from the symptoms of poverty. It is desolate neighborhoods making for destitute communities; deficit school systems providing inadequate education, absence of opportunity producing a sense of despair. This type of environment is a recipe for disaster. It has created a culture of underserved, heavily burdened, ill equipped citizens making irrational, desperate decisions.

The effects of the struggle trickle down



Hale Woodruff, *Settlement and Development*

and become evident in the breakdown of family structure in a survey by the Families and Work Institute. Two thirds of employed parents responded that they didn't have enough time with their kids, and just under two thirds said they didn't have enough time with their spouses. The depreciation of time spent molding and strengthening character within our families results in severe selfishness, moral bankruptcy and poor integration.

An educated family making an honest living without being overworked, providing for themselves and those for whom they are responsible is much more likely to raise individuals who possess a set of good values.

This unit will instill the need for integrity, healthy work ethic, and above all else, an appreciation and respect for life.

Finally, there is no escaping individual accountability. Personal experience has taught me that the first step towards positive, effective growth and development is owning your life and responsibility for success or failure. Regardless of the amount of adversity any one individual must face, if you are determined to prevail, any obstacle could be overcome. If the opportunities for achievement, progress, and prosperity are not readily available to you in life, you must seek them out with bulldog tenacity. A life filled with mindless, selfish indulgences may offer many fleeting moments of pleasure but will always leave you empty and watching in the end. Seek substance first in self and then contribute to your surroundings: family, community and nation. ■



FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to this edition of Northeastern Illinois University's *Stateville Speaks*. While it is long in coming, I hope you agree with me that it was worth the wait. Filled within these pages are words of wisdom, frustration, strength, reflection, regret, courage and most of all hope, from you, both the writers and readers. I thank you all for digging deep and sharing some of your life changing experiences and deepest thoughts. Though we all will not agree or even understand everything expressed in these essays, I trust we will all agree that we can only benefit from the knowledge gained when introduced to other perspectives.

We attempted to print as many essays as we could and made an effort to keep them as original as possible. We tried to clean up a little of the grammar/spelling, but without changing the vernacular. Some essays were so long that we were only able to print sections or edited sections. Though we tried to do so as thoughtfully and carefully as possible, my apologies in advance for any changes, even slight changes, to your work, as we simply did not have the space.

To you writers that asked not to be edited for space we regret we were unable to print your essays in entirety, thus per your requests, we did not print them at all. Also, while did have loose guidelines for the contest, some essays were not printed due to the



Aaron Douglas, *Window Cleaning*

fact they were not on topic. Still, we thank you for them and hope to print them (in full or in part) in our up-coming issues.

Selecting winners was so difficult. The lengths, perspectives and writing styles were so different, and they all offered such insight. Thus, we chose our winners both on how they answered the questions and how it may apply to the largest audiences. Trust me when I say that the next time we do a contest, we will print them and we will leave the final vote for you, the writers/readers to decide.

We chose to weave your essays with art

from the Harlem Renaissance. (Though for you aficionados, some pieces are technically Post- Renaissance.) We did so for many reasons. First, they are beautiful and they tell a multitude of stories, American stories, from pain, suffering and captivity to self-fulfillment, family and dreams. And the implication of renaissance, of course, implies a reawakening, revitalization—a new start, which was a reoccurring theme in many of your essays. It is also what we strive for in our prison reform endeavors for the upcoming year. It might also motivate you artists and us want-to-be artists to get creative.

Finally, yes with the prison closures and your heavy movement, it is an ongoing battle to keep our subscribers list updated. We do not take this lightly. We also had problems with a few editions initially being rejected for admittance into some of the prisons. We trust, for now, that this has been corrected. Many thanks to our publisher Cynthia Kobel for seeing the importance of this project and continuing to back it, as well as NEIU Justice Department Chair, Cris Toffolo for her never ending support. Thank you Alan Mills for being here for us and sharing your vast knowledge, and I mean vast. Thanks Sal Barry for putting it together and getting it done. And most of all thank you, our writers, readers and artists for your support and shared wisdom and letting us be your voice. ■

LESSON LEARNED

By Shelia Martin

After being a Justice Studies major at Northeastern Illinois University for the past few years, I have taken on a whole new perspective of the justice system. They have taught me to have compassion for those that have made mistakes and that treating people in an inhumane manner, as punishment, is not the answer. The experiences that I have had in my classes led me to want to do my internship with *Stateville Speaks*. I wanted to better understand what was really taking place inside of prisons and to help those that are incarcerated by answering the letters that you have sent to *Stateville Speaks*. I wasn't quite sure what to expect when I first started reading the letters that some of you have written

to us. I knew that all of you would be brutally honest about the things that are going on inside the prisons and I knew that I would gain a much better understanding of the prison system. What I didn't expect was that you all would teach me some of the greatest life lessons and completely change the outlook that I have on life. In some of the letters that I read you had discussed how you were finding ways to live the most positive life on the inside that you possibly could. Many of you had taken responsibility for your past mistakes and have been able to move forward and change for the better. I think that being able to find positivity and some happiness inside of prison walls in the most amazing thing and it takes a really strong person to be able to do that. I admire that about all of you. This

has taught me that I should be more thankful for everything that I have and that if those of you that are incarcerated can be positive in a place like prison, then I can be positive about any situation that is thrown my way. I also thought that the poems, stories, and drawings that some of you sent to *Stateville Speaks* were some of the greatest things that I had ever read or seen. They showed how talented you are and I hope that you all continue to share your talents with *Stateville Speaks*. It was truly a privilege to be able to read the letters that some of you have sent to *Stateville Speaks*. All of you have motivated me even more to fight for prison reform that desperately needs to take place. This was definitely an unforgettable experience. I am so grateful to have had it. I wish nothing but the best for all of you. ■

STEMMING THE TIDE: HOW CAN SOCIETY REDUCE INCARCERATION RATES?

By Nicholas Chittick



Palmer Hayden, *Midsummer Night in Harlem*

Introduction America imprisons more of its citizens than any other nation in the world. Moreover, current public sentiment is distinctly pro-incarceration, as communities all over call for tougher laws, longer sentences and harsher prison environments for those convicted of crimes. Punishment? Yes. Rehabilitation? Lock him up, throw away the key and feed ‘em soy and water!

The great contradiction is that our culture romanticizes the criminal lifestyle style, holding the anti-hero thug in high regard. Yet, those who emulate such behavior are virtually guaranteed to end up behind bars, perpetrating the cycle of incarceration. How then, can society reduce soaring incarceration rates?

There are those who seem to think the answer lies in changing the laws so that crimes go unpunished, or at least less punished, a sort of “C’mon, just leave us alone and let us do our thing”, mentality. Wrong. The key to reducing incarceration rates is modifying behavior and attitudes so as not to break laws.

How do we achieve this? The answer, generally, is twofold: prevention and rehabilitation.

Prevention The concept of prevention is simple; guide young people onto a path that does not lead to the inside of a prison. Today’s youth face a diverse number of influences. We examined three main ones.

Parents The first lines of defense against life’s pitfalls are parents. The most important thing any parent can do is easy, care about what kind of person their child becomes. Taking an active role in their kid’s lives, closely monitoring activities and associations, all the standard things good parents do. Children become what they see. That’s why positive examples are so important if a child grows up in a home where gangs, drugs and crime are

a normal presence and incarceration common for family and friends, even one or both parents, then how will that child likely turn out? Parents create their children’s reality and should therefore, take care of what kind of world they create.

Schools When we’re young, schools are our first step into a larger world. It is the place where we first experience community, where peer groups are formed, and we (more or less) discover who we are.

Kids who find something they’re passionate about in school (music, sports, academics, chess... whatever) are much less likely to fall prey to drugs and gangs. This is a well-established fact. But schools today are cutting programs and extracurricular activities like never before. This trend needs to be reversed. Schools should offer opportunities for students to find their “thing”, whatever it might be, as well as mentors who could provide positive directions in a young person’s life.

Communities Why do some communities except drugs, gangs and crime as an inevitable presence while other communities, often only a few miles away, have a zero tolerance for any of these elements? A person’s community leaves an indelible mark upon their character, but not everyone leaves their own mark on their community.

Imagine when you see your neighbor’s 13-year-old son hanging out with thuggish drug dealers. Do you a walk by with A) “Not my problem” attitude? B) Grab them by the scruff and drive them home? C) Or put them to work selling drugs? “Yeah Shorty, we about to stack this paper!” Hint-if you answered “C” then you’re part of the problem.

Children need guidance on the journey from infancy to adulthood, and in the absence of proper guidance they will follow “bad”. It’s up to each of us to decide what role we will play in our own communities, and the sum total of these individual choices determines what kind of community we live in.

SEE TIDE, PAGE 6



IT'S JUST GOOD BUSINESS

By Scott Darnell

Based upon 33 years of incarceration in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), I can honestly say I don't believe there are any viable solutions to the skyrocketing rate of recidivism and overall growth of the offender population under the current system. The truth is that IDOC, as it exists today, is a failure in everything but warehousing its offender population. While there are numerous reasons that contribute to this failure, that go far beyond corrections itself, there are two primary causes that most need addressing.

The first of these is that in its current treatment of the offender, IDOC has created and exploits a population that is economically worth more to society sitting in prison that it is on the outside. When it comes down to it, IDOC isn't training or otherwise trying to rehabilitate people to take their place in society. IDOC has become their place in society.

Corrections is an industry worth, literally, billions of dollars. It loses money only if its product (the inmate) runs low. Creating programs that would provide training and reduce the population by any significant amount would be counterproductive and actually lead to closing prisons and laying off correctional employees.

While some programs do exist under the current system, they exist for very specific, self-serving reasons for instance, they are:

A) Mandated by state and federal law, the absence in which results in fines and/or a costly civil litigation for the prison.

B) They serve to justify current or additional budgetary funding or grants otherwise unavailable.

C) They create and maintain employment for correctional employees.

D) They outsource jobs to the community that will generate funds or save on expenses that corrections could not do for themselves for less.

E) They demonstrate a proven track record in securing or managing the inmate population.

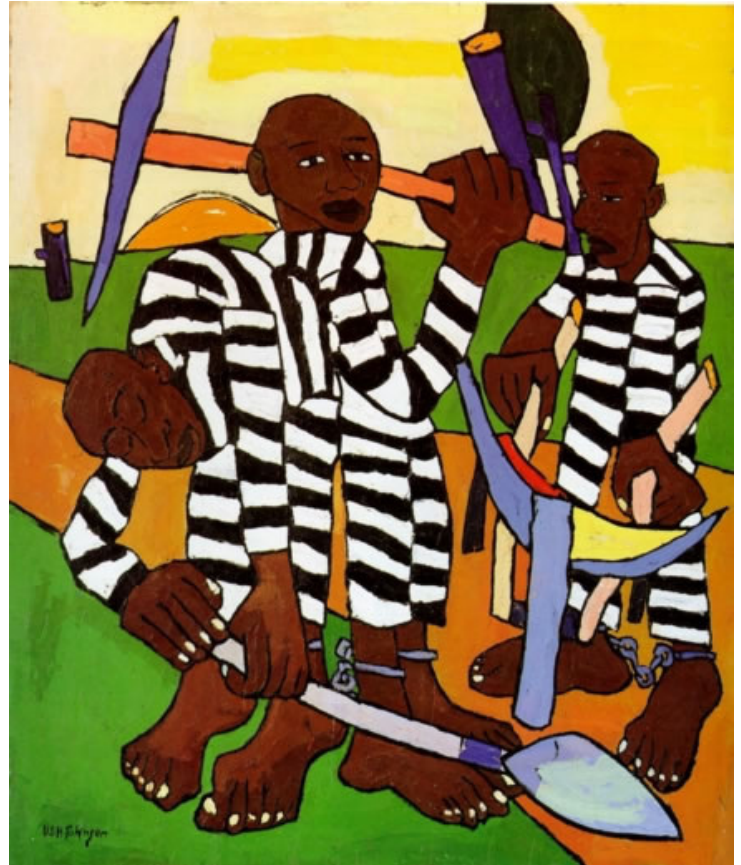
None of this has anything to do with rehabilitation or the lowering of recidivism rates. A program offered through the

local college may employ more teachers, thereby justifying additional funds, but it does nothing to provide the 40-year-old inmate who took a random course in Anatomy 101 with any useful employment skills.

Under current economic conditions and apparent shortage of job opportunities, a felon's GED certificate is all but meaningless in the real world where college graduates are busing tables at local fast food restaurants. On the other hand, if a felon re-offends, perhaps bringing an accomplice back with him, it's an additional tens of thousands of dollars for IDOC.

This leads to my second reason why recidivism will not be reduced to any meaningful level. As hard as it may be to accept, to a large extent the majority of offenders serving time and being released have neither the skills to identify, nor genuine desire necessary to accept responsibility for their actions or make positive life-affirming changes that will keep them out up the prison system.

The average IQ of an inmate serving time in Corrections is about the same as a third grader. Emotionally, most are stunted at around 11 to 12 years old. Their social skills, impulse control, critical thinking ability and other cognitive emotional processes are rudimentary at best, certainly



William H. Johnson, *Chain Gang*

below the average adult on the street who has never been in trouble with the law, outside of an occasional parking ticket.

Many offenders come from broken, dysfunctional homes or have been dragged through the foster care system, which more often than not resulted in some form of emotional physical or sexual abuse. Needless to say, the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol runs high among offenders as does the diagnosis for psychiatric illness and thinking disorders.

While Menard and Dixon Psychiatric Centers used to be the primary facilities to house and treat the mentally ill offender, the system is finding itself overrun with those suffering everything from schizophrenia to bipolar, borderline personality and posttraumatic stress disorders. Most pose a danger either to themselves or others and must be heavily medicated with any number of psychotropic drugs.

While the picture painted here may seem
SEE BUSINESS, PAGE 6



DEAR PARENTS, GUARDIANS, AND GRANDPARENTS

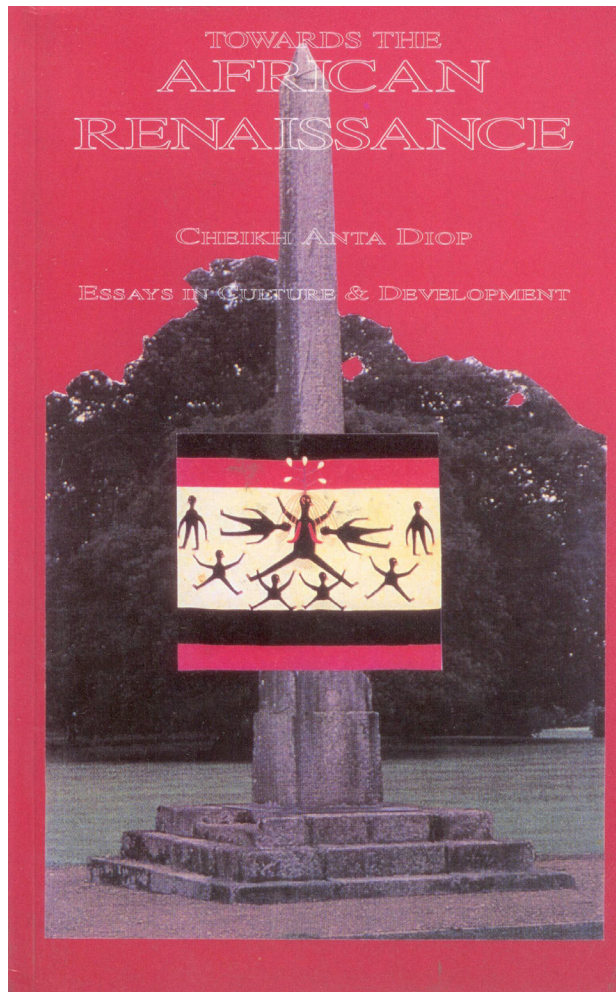
By Joshua Blackwell

You are all concerned with keeping your children out of the prison system. As a resident of the system, I believe I have a few pieces of advice to aid you. You may have heard them all before, but I believe a return to the basics is the best way to break the cycle.

First of all, you must be the authority figure in the child's life. Discipline and punishment are tricky topics, but without these a child will be more likely to believe that his own way is always correct. A child will never respect outside authority or the rules of society if he does not respect the authority of someone he loves. The child must be trained that doing well will be rewarded and doing wrong will not be tolerated. Above all things this will require your time and patience. You cannot expect a child to respect the reasoning of "Because I said so." You must treat him as the intelligent person he is and explain the ultimate consequences of his actions.

Next, you must communicate with your child. What does he like? What does he dislike? What are his dreams? Where did his dreams come from? Who is his hero? These things will change as he grows up, so you must ask all time! Once you know these things, act on their dreams and likes in any way you can. Help them with their schoolwork. Keep them busy with things that they are interested in. Don't let them waste all their time with T. V., video games and the Internet. The only way to reinforce your authority in a child's life is to let them know that you are actually concerned with what they care about. You have to show them rather than just tell them that you have their well-being in mind when you make decisions for them. Without communication you cannot know what your children need.

So, you must instill in the child a sense of community. Let him know that there is more to life than what the T.V. tells him he needs. Children have to learn that cooperation is important to the health and well-being of the world. Helping others is a very fulfill-



Towards the African Renaissance, written by Cheikh Anta Diop, anthropologist, historian, physicist, educator and politician.

ing spiritual exercise. Encourage your child to volunteer, doing these things he is interested in and excels at. Is your child a know it all? Perhaps he can teach others. Is your child shy? Maybe he can help behind the scenes. A very important lesson in anyone's life is that no one can make it on their own. Everything each person does in life has an impact on someone else. Children should learn early the satisfaction that comes from being a positive force in other people's lives.

Another essential part of keeping a child on the right path is to teach and encourage critical thought. This is not something that is traditionally taught in school, but this is the only skill that will accelerate child's maturity so that they are prepared for the real world. This is also a delicate balance, and is some-

thing that cannot be taken lightly. Critical thinking is a two-edged sword. With our present world the way it is, critical thinking can cause a child to reject society's rules as unfounded. Respect for civil authority must be firmly established before a child is taught this vital skill. Beware, though your child will learn this skill whether you teach him or not, and if you can't justify your own actions when he learns it, it could lead to disastrous consequences in your relationship. In this case, honesty has to be your only policy, even if it makes you look bad. Once a child can weigh evidence on both sides of an argument and make an informed choice, he is much better equipped to face the world at large.

Finally, you might say most importantly, you must lead by example. If you do not live the way you tell your children to live, then their entire vision of you as an authority figure will disintegrate. Don't think you can hide what are doing or have done from them- you can't. Only by your example will any child become an adult that is productive and happy. If you show your child that you don't even believe what you tell them, he will

find someone who does practice what they preach. Usually this will lead to terrible consequences due to the lack of positive role models surrounding you. A child has to see that making the right choices will benefit him and make his life more fulfilling.

I realize that these suggestions are very basic in nature. This does not mean that they are easy. In society at this time, there is almost no time for family. It must work together to change the values of our culture. Only by a full reversal of the cultural values of greed, selfishness, and vanity can we hope to heal as a society. Only a return to the basics of life, love, and learning will bring our country to a point where drugs, gangs, and violence are not desirable, nor acceptable and prisons are no longer necessary. ■

TIDE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Rehabilitation The concept of rehabilitation is not as easy as prevention. For those of us who have strayed and fallen into the trap of incarceration, it means getting our lives together and becoming part of the solution. How many of us have heard an older inmates say something to the effect of “This is my 14th bit homie, I know what I’m doing!” No homie, obviously you don’t. There’s no fool like an old fool. Don’t be that guy. Look at three main components of rehabilitation.

Personal responsibility No amount of counseling or programs can change a person. A person has to want to change, and change must come from within. Whatever the unique offense that led each of us to where we are those of us who overcome our circumstances share a responsibility to become part of the solution.

It never ceases to amaze me how many prisoners rant and whine about the hardships and the injustices of imprisonment like political prisoners, incarcerated through no fault of their own. They never mentioned that “Oh yeah, by the way” they robbed, raped, sold

drugs and killed a few people during a home invasion. Be real, even if only to yourself, because the first step in rehabilitation is taking responsibility for your actions.

Programs Once the prisoner makes his decision to change, he or she should take advantage of the programs (although some prisons in Illinois offer more than others) to better themselves.

A lot of people discover something about themselves in prison that they never knew; a talent for art, skill in the barbershop, music, singing or wrapping, a knack for stacking paragraphs or even cooking. There is no shortage of gifted, talented prisoners, but what they choose to do with their talent is find their thing and put it to work.

Family support The importance of family support during, and especially after, a term of imprisonment cannot be overstated. My heart goes out to the guys who step out of the front gate after 20 or 30 years with no family support waiting for them. This is not an uncommon scenario, and those guys have their work

cut out for them.

We should all be so lucky as to have that group of people in our lives that stand on our side no matter what. Right or wrong, they’re down for us. If you’re nearing the end of your imprisonment, but burned bridges with your people, I suggest repairing those bridges before you reach your outdate, because family support could mean the difference between success and failure.

Conclusion How do we stem the tide of incarceration? Sadly, there are no simple answers. No one is defined by a single bad act in their life. We are human beings and the chance for redemption should exist for those who truly want and diligently seek it, but until school maladies such as gangs and drugs are eradicated it looks as though prisons will continue to flourish. The best thing for those of us that have lived through the nightmare can do is put our lives in order to become a positive influence, cautionary presence and guiding authority for those who would repeat our mistakes. ■

BUSINESS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

harsh and does not represent the minority of exceptions, for all intents and purposes, it remains the rule just the same. There are reasons prisons have gun towers, tactical teams in riot gear and segregation units. For the most part inmates are unrepentant, self-serving individuals who have no respect for the law and have broken it on numerous occasions for everyone time they are caught and convicted. Once released, many returned to what has become a lifestyle of violence and criminal activity.

Without serious mental health and behavioral modification programs to inculcate basic coping mechanism and social skills, most never learned in their youth, prisons will continue to warehouse an ever-growing segment of low income, uneducated and mentally ill individuals. Without genuine job-training programs that actually teach skills in professions where an inmate has the ability to earn a decent above minimum wage standard of living that will get them out a high crime areas,

inmates will shuffle back and forth between the free world and the penitentiary until the day they die. Unfortunately, that seems the new and accepted norm in Corrections.

Even with a budgetary crisis in Illinois that seems to be forcing IDOC to close down a number of facilities and halfway houses, nobody is in a hurry to actually get rid of the inmate population in these facilities. Inmates simply get shipped off to other overcrowded prisons where they will stay until their next release date.

As I stated in the beginning, there are any number of reasons why overcrowding and recidivism will remain the problems that they are. Some of these reasons extend far beyond the gates of Corrections. As a whole, the criminal justice system, indeed society itself, benefits to an inordinate, even obscene degree by warehousing its citizens.

Politicians garner more votes the tougher their get-tough-on-crime policies appear. The greater their record of convictions, the more

likely a prosecutor will rise in the ranks or get elected to office. Higher crime rates are always a boon for defense lawyers, bail bonds men bounty hunters and others.

Food vendors, school districts, area colleges, healthcare providers and more benefit from the contract shall obligations necessitated by having a correctional facility in the community. If there is any doubt as to how valuable a community views its local penitentiary, watch how fast they come together for protests and the filing of civil litigation the next time a governor even hints at closing one down.

The criminal justice system in Illinois is a steady, lucrative business dependent upon the flesh and blood, not only of its offender population, but what society decides at any given time is an acceptable loss to those victimized by the repeated offenses committed. Until the solution is worth more to Illinois than the money, nothing is legitimately going to change. ■

***Stateville Speaks* is generously supported by Cynthia Kobel
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THE JUSTICE POLICIES

By Larry Frazier

America's criminal justice policy swings back and forth between liberal and conservative, when it comes to crime. It goes from an emphasis on rehabilitation and social engineering to an emphasis on tougher laws and harsher crimes. To begin, I start with the approach of both.

Traditional liberalism fixes the responsibility for crime and poverty and other social ills. Crime is not a matter of soul, says the liberal, it is a technical problem that could be solved by engineering the right social conditions, devising the right public policies, distributing money to the right places and raising the right physical environment. Furthermore, since liberalism regards crime as the outcome of impersonal forces in the society, it locates responsibility for crime outside the criminal. This approach is often presented as caring and compassionate.

Traditional conservatism policy treats crime as little more than the calculation of incentives. It proposes that crime increases

when the benefits of criminal behavior outweigh the cost of punishment. Therefore the solution is harsher punishment and longer sentences. Ultimately, this approach stems from a mechanistic philosophy that reduces the world to mathematical relations and truth to calculation. It treats people not as moral agents who are disposed to sin but is calculating machines that total up incentives, weigh them against disincentives and then decides whether to commit a crime.

America's staggering crime rates demonstrates that both liberal and conservative approaches to criminal justice have failed. Why? Neither recognizes the dignity of the soul and the ability to make morally significant choices. Neither actually respects human beings as genuine moral agents, capable of both real good and real evil. Neither addresses the need for moral responsibility and repentance. I personally sense the deep sadness and loss of my life because of what sin has robbed me of. Western law, codes and social morals were based on a higher regard for

individual responsibility. It was understood that human beings are moral agents capable of distinguishing right from wrong and are therefore accountable for their actions. Of course, acknowledging responsibility means attributing real praise and blame. Blame, in turn, implies the legitimacy of punishment. That's what makes moral accountability so bittersweet. If a person who breaks the law is merely a dysfunctional victim of circumstances than the remedy is not justice but therapy, and a lawbreaker is not a person with rights but a patient to be cured.

Laws are supposed to be enforceable rules intended to curtail criminal behavior so that law-abiding citizens are free from fear of criminals, crime or violence and basically it hasn't been successful because of the constant violence and crime that has plagued society. It has especially endangered our youth and put our senior citizens in fear of their well-being. It is now clear as the nose on my face that justice policies need a reassessment. ■

HOPE NEEDED

By Vincent Galloway

The facts speak for themselves, one in every hundred Americans are incarcerated in county, state or federal facilities. To stop the cycle of incarceration we must look at the cause of crime. No jobs! Mis-education! Drugs! Gangs!

When new laws are passed the young people should be made aware of them. You can get 15 years 25 years or life if you commit a felony with a firearm. That and other laws should be posted on social media. The only thing the so-called "War on Drugs" and "Tough on Crime" has done is fill prisons and turned warehousing people into a billion-dollar business.

Job training and jobs are needed, schools must teach financial literacy and other life skills. Vocational training and other programs are needed for young people that drop out of school. We must not give up on them because they made a mistake. We must work harder with that person and find



Jacob Lawrence, *Carpenters*

out why they have not been going to school? It could be they are not going because they have to cross gang territory. Summer job programs are needed to teach work skills to keep

young people off the street and out of gangs.

Once young adults come into the criminal justice system lives change and it's another mother or father not there for their children and the street will take hold of them.

Legislative changes are needed so that if a person is convicted and comes into the present system they come out better than when they went in. There are no rehabilitative programs in the maximum-security prisons in the state of Illinois. Most inmates sit in their cells 22 hours a day. Stateville has more programs than Menard or Pontiac. Menard has only a GED

program for a small number of inmates. They are coming out of prison with no skills or vocational training, no job and no hope. ■

HOW TO STOP THE CYCLE OF CRIME, THE REVOLVING DOORS OF PRISON, SYSTEMIC/LEGISLATIVE CHANGES, NEEDED, A NEW PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH

By Ron Kliner

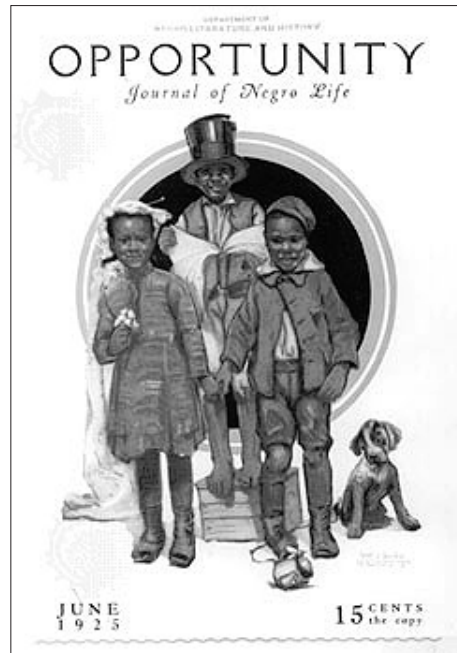
What I'm about to say is common sense and not rocket science. Yet no one wants to say it for fear of being thought crazy, or to say it and not get re-elected! Look at the criticism Cook County Board president Toni Preckwinkle got when she said Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and police Superintendent McCarthy thought they could "arrest their way out of crime" it would not work. She is right and courageous!

Dr. Martin Luther King said "the true test of courage is not what one does at times of convenience, but what one does during controversy". Is what Preckwinkle said controversial? To the establishment, maybe, but she is right and not because I said so, consider please:

"No one is either good or bad; still two boys may start apparently alike and in a few years one may be in the penitentiary and another in Congress, what has caused this difference in results? There can be two causes; one natural equipment the other training and opportunity." Who is to blame?

"Yet people are discerning and humane can reason no way to prevent crime except by inflicting untold misery, degradation and dire vengeance upon the victims who are plainly the product of our boasted civilization." Consider further: "It is indeed strange that with all the knowledge we have gained in the past 100 years we preserve and practice the methods of an ancient and barbarous world in our dealing with crime. So long as this is observed and exercised there can be no change except to keep more cruelties and more wretchedness upon those who are the victims of our foolish system." It is not I who has these thoughts it is and was Clarence Darrow! Why have we ignored such common sense?

Do we not forget if we save the criminal and the crime we do the most important thing of all, more important than all the money we are wasting in an endless Department of Corrections with no return it all to the tax payers... "it" being preventing the murder, robbery, burglary, assault to occur!



Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life,
cover of June 1925 issue

Do we not know by now, as Darrow says, "Man cannot be controlled by fear. To employ that method is to admit defeat for even attempting a saner course. Saving criminals in its last analysis, is only saving children." Is it not better to put all the money, funding, manpower into education and preventing a child to become a criminal then to go to prison where then the burden on society is for evermore? Is it not better to put those same dollars into education and jobs and stopping that same child from becoming a criminal and have a taxpayer harmed as a result of the crime?

As a physician traces a condition to its causes and then treats the cause to prevent it, why do we not put such effort with the knowledge we have and do the same thing for crime? Isn't it better to prevent it, to those harmed because of it and all that comes with it, including endless costs to the taxpayer? These are questions worth asking, with answers we know, yet do nothing. Begging my

final question-why?

Gov. Quinn, Lt. Gov. Simon and legislators abolished the death penalty and rightly so (Darrow would be happy) sadly due to the horrendous record of those sentenced to death, wrongfully convicted and innocent (can anyone begin to imagine as we know and saw all others not sentenced to death in the IDOC and are innocent too?) in Illinois. But, does anyone realize the ridiculous cost the death penalty was and waste of the tax monies for it (better used to fund education for all, just as President Obama did for healthcare for all) while the death penalty or harsh sentences are proven not to deter, stop or prevent crime! Why then do we waste more monies towards harsher sentencing, (no more day for day) 100% sentences, with no parole and rehabilitation to restore an offender to useful citizenship, as per our own Illinois Constitution? How can it be that the "Elderly Bill" for inmates 50 and older has not yet been passed?

I asked, beg for, and implore, please with all my heart, guarantee all kids college education no matter race, color, creed, religion-do it because just like healthcare it is right. It will lessen those to become criminals and those who suffer of crime and lessen the tax burden of prisons. The money saved could be put it toward education and in communities with jobs, and as Jesse Jackson Sr. famously said, "Yale or jail". I say those tax dollars better spent for the whole of society with the return on investment, less crime, less prisoners and more productive society with a return to the family unit, so sorely missed.

Let someone speak out these truths, it may not be politically correct but it "be" correct and truthful. Tell the taxpayers the truth and why, for change. Read Clarence Darrow's *The Story of My Life*, which is as relevant today for crime, it ills and solving it as Machiavelli's *The Prince* is to philosophy.

We need to change our way of thinking and stop the cycle of incarceration and I pray it starts now. ■

Hope...Redemption...Change...

WAYS TO COMBAT THE PLAYGROUND TO PRISON PIPELINE

By Patrice Daniels

Parents, guardians, teachers and adult relatives: your actions influence children far more often than your words. If you want children to grow up to be responsible, disciplined, stable, successful, etc., every day you must actively lead by example. You best teach morals and values with your own conduct. When you practice what you preach you maintain credibility. Actions and words work best in conjunction. I was often told by adults (as a child) “Do as I say not as I do”. The contradictory nature of such a statement was not lost on me. It’s also important to realize that witnessing or being the recipient of mental, verbal, or physical abuse in the home can potentially do irrevocable harm to a child. At a minimum, home has to be a safe, secure and loving environment.

A child’s sense of value/worth must be established early and constantly reinforced by the adults around the child. Children are much more than “mouths to feed”. Although small, they are essentially little people who deserve the very best we can provide. A common thread shared by many who end up in the system is the experience of routinely being told “you’ll never be #@\$%&, just like your daddy/mama wasn’t #@\$%&. It’s hard to inspire anyone with that kind of talk. Remember, self-esteem is partially shaped by one’s external treatment.

Foster and maintain healthy familial ties. Part of the attraction to gangs is the lack of feeling like one is a part of their biological family unit. Many children are basically ignored unless they are misbehaving. For me and many others, no adult ever took an interest in us or our lives except when dishing out punishment. I can’t recall, ever, really being talked to at home. I was mostly yelled at, which rarely creates a sense of feeling like one is wanted or loved. Take the time to get to truly know the child.

As the late, great, visionary Judge Eugene Pincham used to say, “You can’t be what you don’t see”. Professionals who grow up in the hood need to make it a point to give back by returning to the community and by being living, visible examples of what is possible. Being a dope boy, gang banger, rapper or athlete are not the only options. It’s perfectly fine to



Horace Pippin, *Giving Thanks*

expect more from our kids.

It is my belief that human beings are holistic creatures (mind, body, soul). There definitely needs to be a spiritual component to this equation. As a Christian I am partial to its teachings and tenants, but I also recognize that there is utility also in Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, etc. I believe that a solid healthy spiritual foundation sets the stage for how one perceives the world. Rarely will you find adults incarcerated who grew up in practicing home/community environments. It is my opinion that you are better off than not, to have God as the template for how you treat yourself, as well as those around you.

Jobs, jobs, jobs. Poverty is the number one contributing factor to crime. We need more 21st-century job skills/training programs, jobs with benefits and more jobs that pay livable wages. I sold crack cocaine for one reason, to generate an income and literally put food on the table. My mother was an addict and welfare recipient who poorly managed money. Also there was no employed responsible adult male in the home either. I was the “man” of the house. I felt responsible so I did what I thought was best for our tribe. The drug trade was readily available and the

money appeared to be quick and easy. (As a side note the drug game is, in reality, illusory. It’s an unsustainable option that has absolutely no real longevity. Not to mention it also contributes to the continuing deterioration of an already decimated community. At the root, it is poor people exploiting other poor people and that is wrong.)

Decriminalize most youth juvenile delinquency. Right now in America we incarcerate more of our youth than any other industrialized nation in the world, just on its face their something very wrong with that. More emphasis should be placed on restorative justice instead of solely the punitive component. In Illinois the juvenile prisons are cesspools of angry, hurting, emotionally immature, socially inept, predatory, damaged, young people with horrible coping/functioning skills. Shame on our society and shame on the adults, we all should and can do better. ■

Send us your letters and essays
for publication.
See Page 19 for address.

SOLUTIONS

By Vernon Tolbert

I believe better education, housing and employment will minimize the cycle of incarceration, because in the mind of a criminal, he/she does not think about the penalty if caught. They believe they won't get caught, so stiffer penalties won't serve as a deterrent, it will just be costly.

A parent or guardian can help keep their children out of prison by being involved in the children's lives but not just as a parent or guardian, but a friend, one who spends quality time with their children.

Schools should understand the student and engage the student with his or her likes and teach from that perspective, if possible.

Changes for a community include holding community leaders, small businesses and community members accountable for their actions and inactions.

The systemic legislative changes that need to be made should include teaching/passing laws that teach people how to become independent and make grants or loans easier to obtain.

To keep the neighborhood youth from being incarcerated would mean getting involved in their day to day activities by offering the youth something positive to do. It would be something they enjoy doing day to day. These creations can vary from time to time and place to place.

In advising the governor, while incarcerated, teach the prisoners independence by making school and employment mandatory, because housing and other necessities are not free while in prison or awaiting trial in the Cook County Jail. So, create programs that will break the cycle of mass incarceration, programs of "independence". ■



Jacob Lawrence, *Family*

RESTORED CITIZENSHIP

By La'Shawn Wilson

There's a dire need for more comprehensive rehabilitation in the efforts of encouraging offenders to strive for and maintain their freedom. The United States Constitution – Eighth Amendment is being violated in terms of cruel and unusual punishment to hold a person for years and hinder their abilities to progress.

Today's cycle of incarceration, is based solely on the idea of maximum control over the inmates and have deterred true rehabilitation programs from meeting the needs of the offenders. The system has gone from assisting the needs to stripping and hindering any intentions of progress. And that satiates the obscured intentions of the system... Lock 'em up and destroy their capacity to evolve, so they can return back to prison. This perpetual cycle wasn't designed to end.

In the book *Live From Death Row*, Mumia Abu Jamal states "That a person's behavior is systemically modified to meet the status quo... keep the system alive." The communities are being mis-informed, through the media, that the offenders are violent criminals, to ensure harsher punishments, imprisonment, and increase self-imposed deprivation.

I can say that with over 22 years of experiencing the system (yet with a sane and sound mind) I have witnessed the draining of vital sap from those whose roots of hope run deep. But once a person has been de-socialized and imprisoned they become politically, economically and socially unable to participate in the mainstream of society! The irony of it all is that the political parties talk about family importance, while using prisons as a mechanism to commit systematic incarceration and mass warehousing.

What's really needed are programs that encourages the development of sound marketable business skills that makes an individual self-reliant and able to survive upon their return to society, without having to rely on criminal activities as an economical means of survival. But there are few, if any, elected officials adopting such policies that will greatly reduce the recidivist rates and history holds this that to be true.

Nevertheless, to be considered with "restored citizenship" one must first be given the opportunity to become a useful and produc-

COMMUNITY CHANGES

By Patrick Tullis

For communities to change they need to first change their attitude towards street gangs. Not all street gang members are violent. Some like me did it for the money I made selling weed. It helped with my family needs. I also liked all the young women who liked hanging around us. I learned how to work on cars, etc. with the gang.

The community needs to find the others who want to change and offer them something to change for, like jobs, buying your first car with real earned money (not drop money), community workshop, afterschool programs on education about life, holding a job, family, helping one another.

Community also needs to show love and forgiveness and reach out more. If I was involved more with the community back when I ran on the streets I might not be here at Pinckneyville C.C. with 4 ½ years left on a sixty-year sentence. The gang was my life. It should have been community. There are good people in the community who can help. There are also good people in here who have made mistakes who can make a difference in the community if they are welcomed back. There are a not a lot in here, but some can make a difference if given a chance.

Community and community leaders is the key to changing the neighborhood. They just have to have the need for it, the want for it and give some who are willing a chance to work with and in the community. Help go back to basics. Give things like clothes to the people who need them, for doing good in the community, like cleanup programs, paint, graffiti removal, grass cutting, helping others and working together.

It can work and even if only one human life is saved by the workings of the community it's worth it in gold. I wish I hadn't gotten into the gangs, they lost me my freedom for 30 years and none of them are here for me. I would like to think the community would be different and one day I hope to be a community leader myself. ■

And that can only be accomplished through rehabilitative programs. As a prisoner I am asking for the help that will allow me to help myself is a transition into society. I sincerely thank you. ■

WILDERNESS HOMES

By Donald McDonald

A little one-year-old toddler walks into the living room like he/she does every day. No one has checked its diaper. No one has picked it up, said “I love you”, or pinched its cheek. A sibling pushes it out of the way, the mother steps around it without acknowledgment. No one is cruel, it’s just the way things are and have always been.

The child enters school at age 6. Homework is not given, no parent expects it. Not knowing how to read and now too embarrassed to tell someone, if that person to tell existed.

The streets become home, loyalty is to the streets. The streets embrace, educate and reward. Mom is the gang and daddy is the gang chief. Soldiers give love, the chief discipline. Prison is the home. It rewards you with protection from your enemies, food and shelter.

The picture just painted is my empirical truth as the son of a fatherless home, working mother and an incarcerated father of 10.

Every morning when I was free I hugged each child and whispered in their ear “I love you”. We played after school and read after dinner. When my kids talked about school, they would talk about colleges. After I was locked up, all but one of my children dropped out of school and has five children each.

I hope someone listens to my story, because if you asked most African American prisoners how often they were hugged or told they were loved, you would be surprised to find out most prisoners, black or white, were never hugged or loved.

I propose that every parent who has a child in public schools be required to attend a night parenting class, at their child’s school, taught by volunteer college instructors or sociologists. That *Stateville Speaks* creates a contest for instructors at area colleges to develop a curriculum for these classes. It should not matter how old the parent or how many children in the house. Those parents without babysitters would bring their children with them to attend afterschool tutoring and activities. The community pays the cost by volunteering and donating their time.

The “Village of Chicago” and other communities can truly raise their children by this program. ■



Palmer Hayden, *Christmas 1939*

THE CYCLE OF INCARCERATION

By Vernon Watts

To even begin stopping the cycle of incarceration, we must as a people, first and most definitely foremost, acknowledge to the entire planet what occurred, some hundred odd years ago in the building this so-called New World. The enslavement of the darkest race is the forefront of sexism, elitism, classism and degradism, which the latter is in part the cause of mass incarceration. Being a black man and not to veer too much into slavery, but my people in particular, are still infested, fumigated and embedded by the characteristic traits that have been unconsciously or consciously passed on. From its inception until Chicago in 2012, having the nation’s highest murder rate, with more murders than the Middle East War that year; now that’s truly being a P.O.W.(people of wallow). This meaning our feet, brains and hearts are still stuck on those muddied, filthy and horrific plantations, so until we as a people and we as a nation transition from the conquering state to the togetherness state, incarceration will continue its stranglehold on so many of our fathers mothers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and relatives.

The cycle will forever remain prevalent because our youth have no role models with the dedication to them, to even go against the ills of today and fight the secular beliefs, like an M.L.K., Malcolm, Huey P. or Fred Hampton. So instead, they emulate Lil Wayne, Nikki Minaj, and Drake. They get caught between a dream and a nightmare; the dream to want better for themselves and the nightmare that the music says “sex with as many women as possible, never show weakness, if you’re over there you not with me and to be different” at the cost of your true identity. Then 40 years will have passed and then they recognize they were damn fools.

It’s sad that for me, personally, the cycle had to stop by my incarceration. Meaning that by me being in prison has freed me to grow from that inner child that was halted for years until now, up at 3:21a.m., writing this piece with conviction. This is not to say everyone will have to experience this to be free but these 15 years have awakened that dormant intelligence, to think and have rationale and channel the fight many before me fought, to put a dead end to the genocide, as in incarceration.

Now last but not least, I want the readers to please read beyond these words and know I’m far from a black nationalists, a racist or some hell-bent man on the mission to somehow get back pay for those years of slavery because they couldn’t be my truth here! I’m just a man from the human race with opinion on the traps that bond many like me to become enslaved over again until they are trapped forever. So this is just a solution for a problem that’s gone, take black, white, brown, red, and every entity on this un-incarcerated planet to stop the imprisonment of mind, body and soul; so I leave in poem writing we must address why the cycle continues. ■

Thanks to Illinois Prison Talk (IPT) www.illinoisprisonstalk.com
for support and further dissemination of *Stateville Speaks*
and your tireless reform efforts.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF CRIMINAL PUNISHMENT?

By Jessie Swift

What are the goals of criminal punishment? Ideally, they should encompass retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation. But with the rise of tough on crime mentality, rehabilitation as a goal has been left to fall by the waysides; dwindling to the brink of non-existence. Retribution itself has taken center stage, becoming the sole aim of criminal punishment and making it synonymous with incarceration. Does society in general, want those who have been touched by the criminal justice system back amongst them in the free world? Or is the ultimate end of incarceration just that- the end?

Despite public perception, prisoners are some of the most in need members of this country's population when it comes to education. The majority of prisoners have neither a high school diploma nor a G.E.D. on top of that, only 46% of prisoners have had some high school and 16.4% have had no high school experience whatsoever. Although prisons usually offer some sort of G.E.D. Program, enrollment is extremely low and the waiting lists are very long. Prison literacy is another problem all its own: 19% of adult inmates are completely illiterate while 40% are functionally illiterate. Many prisoners also have to deal with educational impediments such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorder and other learning disabilities, as well as mental health illnesses. These facts being known, nothing is being done to correct these problems or to help prisoners become better people.

As in any other state, in Illinois once a criminal case has been adjudicated more often than not the person convicted of the crime is sent to the Department of Corrections. The goal of "corrections" as stated by the Illinois state Constitution and statutory law, is supposed to be to return the offender to "useful citizenship". Rehabilitation would seem to be a necessary factor in a convicted criminal becoming a useful citizen. However, the public's thirst to become tougher on crime, inflamed by the politicians, has led to harsher prison conditions and less rehabilitation. Out of cell activities, especially rehabilitative programs such as educational and vocational training for prisoners have been seriously neglected or outright abolished across-the-board.

With nothing productive in which to take

part, little or no encouragement, and lacking the comprehensive skills to do anything on their own, prisoners are left to spend the majority of their time in their cells wasting away, or perhaps dwelling on their own criminality. As stated in the John Howard Association report entitled *Cuts in Prison Education Put Illinois at Risk*, (2010):

"Illinois college-based prison education programs are diminishing; a trend certain to raise correctional costs and foster crime. For much of the past decade, Illinois has allowed its prison vocational and academic programs to either wither away... This trend is significant... Education protects the public from crime. Now the pace of neglect is accelerating. When education reduces recidivism, it minimizes the financial and social costs of crime. Education does not cost the public money; it saves money... But unless state government finds money to finance community colleges, prison educational programs are certain to continue shrinking, and the public will be the victim".

Without institutional programs to help address the rehabilitative issues, this situation will continue to get worse, not better.

Retribution in and of itself has become the focus of criminal punishment. Not only has it created a more unforgiving prison environment, but the tough on crime stance has also given rise tougher laws of harsher penalties for breaking the law. Truth in sentencing statutes and firearm enhancements alone have increase the amount of time offenders must spend behind bars. In most cases the sentenc-



Allan Rohan Crite, *School's Out*

es handed down are so great number that the people receiving them will never live outside of prison again. This "lock 'em up and throw away the key" mindset and its statutory by-products don't leave much room for prisoners to regain their freedom, let alone returned to "useful citizenship".

At the time of this writing I am currently in prison in the Illinois Department of Corrections in the 14th year of a 65 year sentence. I was sentenced under the truth-in-sentencing guidelines. This means that although I was originally incarcerated when I was 18 years old, I will not be eligible for release until I'm at least 81 years of age. Does the fact that I was convicted of the crime of murder mean that I possess no redeemable qualities? Do I not have in me the potential to become a productive member of society? A useful citizen? Many individuals, like me, that have been incarcerated by the criminal justice system were convicted of crimes committed when they were young and have been sentenced to do exorbitant amounts of time. And even if the sentence that they have been given doesn't exceed the bounds of a human lifetime, they will be released with no job or life skills, having learned nothing useful during their confinement.

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THE WORST TORTURE

By Nathan Sessing

I know all too well the dangerous cycle of crime and drugs that can ruin young lives. At 26, I've already lived eight of my years in maximum-security prisons. Maybe you'd like to know why?

When I was 15, my older sister got a roommate who introduced her to methamphetamines. It wasn't long after that, that my sister introduced me to the drug. The first night that I smoked speed my whole body rushed with powerful pleasure. I was full of vitality and happiness as I stayed up all night smoking with my sister and her older friends, surfing a powerful wave of high. In the morning, however, I began to feel depressed, sick and weak. My system had crashed from its drug-induced peak.

But the drugs were always there and despite the negative effects, I was blind to the harm they were causing. I thought cool people use speed and I wanted to be part of my sister's older crowd of friends, so I continued using. But it wasn't long before the psychotropic effects of the speed started to catch up with me. It started with a belief that I was being followed by undercover police. I thought they were continuously driving past the house, had a stakeout across the street and that strangers who came over were informants. I even accused someone of that to his face!

But things only got worse, especially when I would smoke pot and speed at the same time, a weird experience known as "stuck on stupid". My delusions graduated to a belief that the government was trying to put me on mind control. Every thought of mine was being read; everyone was actually an agent working for the government.

My paranoia and psychopathy made me highly antisocial and depressed. I lost all my friends and I quit taking care of myself and going to school. Once, in a fit of rage for perceived wrongs, I attack my father in the garage. After that, I ran away lived under a bridge for three days. By that point I believed I had to murder someone in order to submit to mind control, which would end my mental torture. Once I took a knife and went out into the neighborhood. I was trying to steal a car when a man approached me and asked what I was doing. I stabbed him in the stomach and ran away.

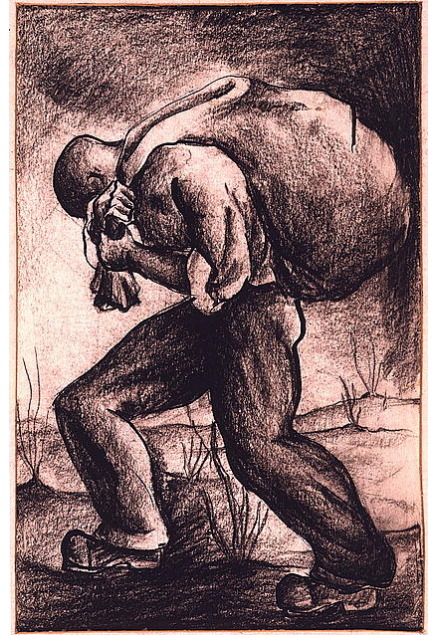
A few days later I broke into a home by smashing in a sliding glass door with a baseball bat. There was a man there and I killed him with a baseball bat and a knife. It wasn't long before I was arrested for the stabbing and murder. While in the county jail I was bought a little speed and snorted it. Once again, my delusions consumed my mind. I attacked a cellie and a deputy, kicked my door and screamed until the officers came. I did that a few times, naked and had to be maced.

When I was sentenced, I was given life without the possibility of parole and sent to a maximum-security prison. More than once I asked to be put in protective custody, but the officer blew me off. As an inmate with a long sentence I was ordered by other inmates to stab someone. I didn't want to do that, but I had no choice as if I refused, I would be the one being stabbed.

I got thrown into the hole for 19 months for the stabbing. That was one of the worst times in my life. Inmates in the hole are given few articles of clothing, so it's very cold in the winter. The only time I was let out of the cell was to shower once every three days or go into a cell sized cage outdoors for a couple of hours every few days or so. Besides my books and my TV, there is nothing to do for entertainment. The worst part about it was that the only visit I could get with my family was an hour, once a week, and there was a panel of glass separating us!

One thing I learned in the hole was about a section of prison called Sensitive Needs Yards S.N.Y. (as found in some state prisons, such as in California). This is where all the inmates go who need protection or don't want to live with the game politics. When I was done with my hole term, I decided to go to S.N.Y. It was like being released from a prison within a prison. There were many, many more freedoms. I suddenly had access to a large yard to play sports on, a day room where I could play games, make phone calls, and socialize; packages of food, clothing, music and access to jobs and education.

I found S.N.Y. to be a place where I could be free from danger and could live life the way I wanted. It was and still is a place where I can improve my character and better myself spiritually. Now I spend my time practicing my religion, aspiring to become a writer and



Robert Blackburn, *Man with Load*

playing sports.

I always look back at the immature, impulsive youth I was and wish I could grab myself by the shoulders back then and shake them. I wish I would've had a role model or religion I could've used for guidance. I wish I could change the belief I had that I was too strong to succumb to the effects of drugs, that life wasn't cool if you're not taking risks.

I want for all youth to realize how dangerous the path of crime and drugs is- maybe it doesn't seem like it right away but later down the line, the path will lead to destruction. I want all youth out there who are making unwise decisions regarding drugs and crimes to really think hard about how I was very, very similar to how you are. I've lived a life like yours, lived it more years than you have and I could look back and reflect on what I wish I would've done differently.

The effects of illegal drugs are real and highly dangerous. Not only was my life ruined, but another life was ended due to my actions. I could've hurt my family or friends very badly due to the psychotic craze the drugs put me in. And my incarceration has devastated my entire family who grieves over me every day and are burdened by having to support me. They may never understand why I did what I did, but I do, and living with that is the worst torture of all. ■

BEING HUMAN

By Gregory Hope

People here in America are so damn wrapped up in our own inabilities to see beyond the looming crisis and chaos that we all face. We lack sufficient knowledge, wisdom and a full understanding of how to solve today's problems. Our so-called problems cut across all colors, religions and boundaries. Basic beliefs and ideas were never supposed to stand in our way or become so damn complicated that we lost sight of the truth and the goals.

Anger is this country's biggest problem that we, as a nation, face. The true nature of our anger lies deep down inside us all. We must face the truth about ourselves and others, that we are a nation of haters, for everything and everyone. We hate just for the love of it. We established all kinds of so-called life doctrines for hate. We never look behind the scenes to see who is pulling the strings. We have no faith in ourselves or each other.

Anger and hatred are of the same materials that I believe that hell must be made of. We, as a nation, are hateful people. I know that people are on their own so-called paths with their own struggles. We all have had the tendency to push one another's buttons. We live in a very tragic time and situation; just look at the town of Sandy Hook and the Trayvon Martin case, for example. Is this what America has come to, and what about the consequences that is looming ahead in our near future? This country's love for sex and violence has brought us all to the edge of no return. I just hope that it is not true. No one has a clue about what is really going on in our so-called world that we all live in. I know there is no quick fix to all of our so-called problems, but if we truly want to change things we can. We have done it before.

We have to prepare ourselves for the worst and hope for the best. We all need to make a conscious effort for hope and change for us all. Just the very facts that we all can recognize as scientifically true, we have no sanctuary from ourselves or our hatred! We have always lived on the so-called fiscal cliff. We as humans can examine the real problems and choose our best options. God Almighty may have given us the ability to think rationally, but not all of us can do that. Most people are under the so-called mistaken impression

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SELF-KNOWLEDGE, CHOICES SELF-WORTH

By Andre Paterson

The rising of the sun was accompanied by the raising of a fifth bottle to my lips. When the sun set my bottle consumption would just be reaching its zenith. The first swig goes down smooth, and then becomes needles shooting down my throat. I grimace, not in pain, but in appreciation of the process. I tuned into my senses to see if the desired effects were kicking in yet. Tongue was kind of numb, but I was yet to feel the familiar warmth wash over my face, and that heavy blanket spread across my brain.

I impatiently took several longer swigs, emptying its contents, determined to get where I needed to be, so I could go outside. I felt the well-known weight of a comforter descending upon me, shrouding me in its security. I stood up for confirmation. I could barely feel the hardwood floor beneath me. "Yeah, I'm ready." I teleported to the dresser where I grabbed my pistol, tucked it in my waistband and headed out the door.

I could name alcohol as the primary influence that played a role in my incarceration, but that wouldn't be telling the whole story. Abuse of alcohol is just a symptom of a deeper rooted disease; infected ideas. "Ideas are the substance of behavior." Meaning that what people do is motivated by what they believe and what they believe springs from what they experience, what they are taught. What I believe about myself and what many young people believe about themselves brings about these self-destructive attitudes. They don't value other lives because they don't have any self-worth.

My experiences with family, peers and apathetic community dictated that I wasn't someone worthy of love; I wasn't a desirable friend or companion, I didn't fit in. I also believed that the pursuit of comfortable living, via a legitimate adult existence, (hard work, responsibility, perseverance) would be a burden that wasn't worth carrying, that I didn't have the strength to carry. So I ran away from life, forfeiting all responsibility, retreating into a land of illusion, where I thought alcohol made me a more lovable person and gave me the courage to deal with a mediocre life.

If I could point to one thing that would

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By Robert West

At one time, every old person had once been a young person eager to grow up fast. He or she was aware of the popular stuff and he or she had to make a decision about whether or not they should get involved or participate in the "happenings" of the moment. Also, the old people today, back in their youth, dealt with negative influences and peer pressure from their friends and they were tempted to simply do nothing with their lives except to just live life carefree and get high on drugs or alcohol, feel mellow and have fun.

The older people we look at today enjoying a little comfortable living had, many years ago, enough foresight in their youth to realize the importance of a sober lifestyle and the great value of finishing school so they would be in the best position to find a job so he or she could be able to earn a living pay their own way through life. Although some of their teenage friends, with having had the same available opportunities, chose to stay in the "partying" and "get high" groups of people, not taking full advantage of school or being serious with their lives. For those short-sighted individuals who had failed to see the worth of having a full and complete education when young, later on in life they became a bum or junkie, because while young they had given serious thought to how they could survive during the years of old age.

Surely, the street people seen begging for their survival hadn't ever thought when they were young that they would grow up and become an adult dope-fiend or a criminal. Their journey of failure began slowly and they thought that it couldn't happen to them because they were young and had a lot of time left for having some fun. So their lives had gradually turned bad after a decision was made by them not to excel in school or to finish school, but to be lazy and do drugs, party and to play. And while those addicts had been young, during the years of their youth, drug or alcohol addiction crept upon them. It overpowered their minds to where every day, their thoughts are to think of some clever ways to take advantage of people in an effort to get money to buy dope.

Heroin, cocaine and meth, etc. are powerful mind and mood altering substances which

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PART OF THE SOLUTION: FUNCTIONING FAMILIES

By Charles Bickerstaff

In life there are some things we can choose, some things we cannot. We cannot choose our mother and our father; we cannot choose to be born into poverty into wealth; we cannot choose to be born black or white, Asian or Latino. But, whatever hand we are dealt, we can choose how it's played to make the best of it. As the country singer Kenny Rogers advised, "You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, know when to run".

I was late to the game of crime and punishment, back until I was 56 years old I had never been arrested; even my traffic tickets could be counted on one hand. Now, having been locked away for nearly 6 years I have had time to consider why I avoided trouble in my youth and what forces may have shaped my life for the better.

During childhood, some would have considered us poor. Sometimes we lived in a cramped apartment, sometimes in an 8 x 36' trailer. Mom would darn socks instead of buying new. Our clothes did not have designer labels, but they were clean and in good repair; our home was a safe loving oasis, filled with conversation and learning. Let me elaborate.

First, we had both a mother and a father who were married to each other and who took their vows of love, respect and commitment seriously. The family is the basic economic and social unit of society. If families are strong, societies will reflect that strength in peaceful, law-abiding neighborhoods populated by peaceful, law-abiding citizens. Unfortunately, our society and its well-meaning government often discourage men for making a commitment to help their families function. Men who love and respect their wives, not



Archibald J. Motley Jr., *Mending Socks*

only set a proper example for the children, but they create an environment that is safe powerful and economically sound.

Second, we ate dinner as a family, praying our table prayer, thanking God for our blessings. We also attended church, but sitting down each day for a meal without the distraction of a TV, discussing the day's events, helped shape us socially; civil conversations created critical thinking, helped solve problems, and presented other sides of important issues. The whole idea of sitting down together for a meal may sound simple, silly and out of date, but family members engaged in polite, spiritual conversation are better able to deal with life's problems and better able to deal with the questionable competing forces outside the walls of a loving home.

Finally, we were dealt the desire for life-long learning. Mom read to us voraciously, demonstrating early the values of education

and making right choices. Each night she would read Bible stories, stories of adventure and stories of life's lessons illustrated by such fables as "The Ant and the Grasshopper", "The Dog and his Bone" and "The Stone in the Road". Although I was maybe three or four years old when I first heard those tales, their impact on my life still resonates. The benefits of hard work, the consequences of greed and the rewards of being helpful are important lessons best learned early in life. Education did not begin in kindergarten or "Head Start", it began at home with a parent or sibling reading stories of a better life, sharing the hopes and dreams of humankind.

So what happened to me? Simple, I tossed that hand I have been dealt and ignored the wise counsel of my parents. I chose to gamble with another set of cards and I lost. I should've known when to walk away from trouble when it came my way, but I didn't. I did not wear armband of victimhood on my sleeve, nor did I blame my family or society for the choices I made.

Still, even with an 80 year sentence, there are things no prosecutor, judge, jury or corrections officer can take. They cannot crush a positive attitude, nor can they destroy a faith in a better tomorrow.

It is not where one lives that counts, it is how one lives. Now, as I consider the latest hand I have been dealt, this one by the criminal justice system, I can still hold out hope; I could still honor my father and my mother; and I could still win the game by playing prudently the cards left in my hand. ■

HUMAN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

that the world's population are their slaves. I know that we are far from being perfect, but we need to try. I wake up every morning and think this day will be better than yesterday, and I truly believe that. Most things in life can be easily fixed by all of us. I am in solitary confinement, a 6 x 8 cell now for 10 long years and if I can help others in here I know damn well you can help others out there.

I also believe in justice. It just didn't

work out for me and maybe someday I'll tell you all about it. But for now let's reflect on the path of our lives. I choose my words very carefully. I say what I mean and mean what I say. I know the first step for anyone to accept is usually the hardest. People start hating at an early age in their life. People who take a leap of faith keep their trust and hope alive. After at least 2000 years of anger, hatred and self-loathing, the liars and scammers are to-

tally exposed for what they really are.

There will come a time when you will have to let go of all your hatred and anger and bitterness for the world and its people. You might think you have the right, but you don't. We can all share in the knowledge of human. ■

EDUCATION NOW OR PRISON LATER: SOCIETY MUST CHOOSE

By Tyrone Harvey

In observance of society, from my position, it's clear the arguments concerning how to properly educate our children are all out of place. I watch and listen in discussions as politics in ideologies take hold and ultimately render our children's future of no consequence. It's apparent from my looking glass, parents and teachers and policymakers are more concerned with themselves rather than creating effective learning models capable of nurturing the whole child. In all cases where the child is the subject, society as a whole shall, should, and must function altruistically for the success thereof.

Moreover, education ought to be viewed as a human right; the cognitive activity of premeditation intent on the furtherance of the Republic. Since the child will ultimately inherit the world it is necessary we equip them with the proper life tools if they are to make addendum to history. Too often I find myself the elected parent of 19-year-olds who lost their way in life, only to find it while serving 20, 30, 40 or life in prison.

Why is this happening? How has society so failed Black and Latino boys in matters of education? For that matter, why has education failed White boys? These boys enter prison lost, abandoned and abused. By the time they awaken from their drug-induced stupor they soon realize it is in the prison where they will die. This is not only a tragedy for our kids but our society. Therefore the blood of these young men is on the hand of every neighborhood, town and suburb in America. Representing the people, politicians must be made to realize we cannot incarcerate our way out of the moral decadence of our society. They must realize an equal, proper and/or uniform education is the only hope for navigating the ever-changing landscape of America and the competing world. Remember morality and ethics is a universal initiative with local consequences. And therefore, education is the only force capable of yielding universalized results.

Possessing no letter behind my name I am amazed sometimes at my ability to transform the thinking of men society have deemed criminal in mind and inaction. Who am I but



Hale Woodruff, *Cinque Exhorts his Captives*

a convicted man, what's wrong with society that it takes other so-called deviants to guide these broken men? I am a man of reform. As a man of reform I don't take my duty to enlighten broken souls lightly. The reality is, I've grown tired of America using the judicial process and the prison industrial complex as a mechanism to rid societal civil and intellectual incompetence.

I surmise for teachers to be effective they too must demonstrate excellence in order to educate. This I know by doing. Before I approach any convicted 19-year-old I first demonstrate to them a number of moral, ethical and social values—in my environment men of principle stand out like a sore thumb. Once such a demonstration of moral uprightness is introduced within their cognitive universe, I then proceed to engage in their prevailing view on God, self and others. Challenging their notions on the Higher Power ought to precede all other learning. As it is their knowledge which provides me an insight

into the prisoner's moral, social and ethical reasoning. Moreover, it is through effective communication that learning is essentially introduced.

Finally, interacting with young prisoner informs me of societies (i.e. teachers, parents, politicians) inability to draw out the potential innate in each child. The over incarceration of these young men is the broadest indication of incompetence on every level of our young democracy. The criminal justice system cannot be the answer for the neglect of our future. At the rate America is locking away its citizens, ex-cons will have enough numbers to mount their own revolution for change. We are the new "underclass"! America will no longer be able to incarcerate itself out of this mess; the quality of education is the only method pure enough to preserve the Republic. Time is running out! ■

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THE THOUSAND WORD SOLUTION

By Keith Bennett

August of 1991 I took an innocent life. I was the number one suspect but never charged. In August 1993 I committed the same horrible crime. 10 days after my 19th birthday I was thrown in jail, subsequently receiving life +40 years. If I'm never released and live to be 100 years old I'll spent 81 years of my life incarcerated. As difficult as this is for me to accept, my deepest regret will always remain to be the fact that my actions and decisions took two innocent lives and cost their loved ones and mine unbearable pain and destroyed everyone's lives involved. I cannot change what I've done and nothing or no one could punish me as my conscience has done.

Several years I spent thinking about my mistakes and what led to them. The fact is that had I not abused drugs and rebelled against my father's rules and the laws of society I'd never have committed these horrible crimes. I completely understand that innocent people end up in prison or are even put to death, but I also understand the best chance any of us have at staying out of prison is by "not breaking the law". When we choose to sell drugs and rob people it's because we would rather make a lot of quick and easy money. If I were released from prison and was unable to find anyone willing to hire me I could cut grass, trim bushes, rake leaves, shovel snow and collect aluminum. Every legal odd job I could find I'd do with pride. Most everyone who has never committed a crime has worked extremely hard for what they wanted in life; they didn't steal and sell drugs.

In the 19 years of my incarceration I've witnessed numerous criminals coming straight back to prison or hear about them becoming victims of gang violence and their mentalities never changed. Gang bangers and drugs were and still are their way of life. If we decide to continue down that same path that placed us in prison in the first place common sense should tell us prison is where we will spend our lives. We could either spend our time talking to our homies about nothing and singing songs or we could put our mind to work and figure out how to change our life.

To spend 24 hours a day confined within this prison cell and never accomplish anything productive and positive is pathetic. If



Jacob Lawrence, *The Lovers*

we cannot change on our own how can we blame anyone other than ourselves for our failures? It is completely up to us to change. Nothing could convince me that the majority of fellow inmates are waiting for someone to come show them how to change. During my time incarcerated, I've certainly had more downs than ups but as a failure I always keep in mind that champions are not those who never fail, they are those who never quit.

Although I might die in prison I still focus on freedom and my future. Everything that I have learned I'm proud to admit I'm self-taught. I didn't make excuses with no real desire to change and learn. There are a number of different resources with the tools to teach, the chaplain, prison library, free bookstores, etc., one only needs to be willing to order the right books and study them, not the books full of poisons teaching hate hypocrisy and bogus conspiracy theories. People do live productive lives after being released from prison, those people possess the desire to change and learn.

I struggled with drug addiction and mental health issues the first several years of my incarceration but overcome them. In that time I've written several prison stories and have an awesome portfolio of Gothic/Pagan art I hope to one day publish. I also have three computer business ideas completely laid out and ready to go; all I'm missing is the computer. I also knew I could pass the CDL exam with flying colors and I continued looking for the love of my life.

I cannot explain in a thousand words how the Governor can solve this problem; however gangs drugs and terrible work ethics are the problem. We, as criminals, could change our fate with the desire to change. We are criminals because we broke the law and if we continue to break the law we will continue to serve time in prison. Putting it bluntly, the majority find it easier to steal, sell drugs and come to prison than to

cut grass, trim bushes, rake leaves and shovel snow.

Prison should be a place where we want to change and not where we gamble, do drugs, gang bang and complain because nobody is showing us how to live positive and productive lives. Those of you who have chosen the gang bangers lifestyle or a life of crime and are only serving a short time in prison, for those of you who think gangbangers and criminals are cool, take a moment and imagine yourself spending 81 years of your life in a prison cell. I'll probably never wrap my arms around a woman again, never make her laugh and smile never lie in bed with her make love to her-never enjoy life together. I am man enough to admit it hurts and my mistakes are my own.

I believe it should be understood that every privilege we lost, we lost because we abused it. The prison administration took canned goods because inmates and officers kept getting struck in the head and cut and stabbed with them. They took course stingers and baby oil because inmates would boil the baby oil and throw it on inmates and officers. They took our curtains because inmates continued to ignite their neighbor's curtains, plus offices needed to see in each cell to make sure inmates were not being assaulted. Without any more room for examples I'm positive you get the picture. It's entirely up to us to change, stop blaming others for your behavior. ■

ORIGINAL HIDDEN MYSTERY

By Michael Stone

I chose this title because it clearly defines who we are and what we have become. Original explains our originality, our origin and what were supposed to demonstrate with respect to that. I also intend to explain the condition and mentality that has kept us a hidden mystery not only to society but to ourselves.

My physical form was born in the 80s, so I grew up in the crack era and all the effects that came with that is what raised me; raised a whole generation of dudes. The reality is that the mentality that produced us was dead; the mentality that produced that mentality was dead. The thing that this society will never acknowledge or take seriously is that mental death is real. I am not writing this as another essay for people to understand the condition that they never lived in their life, but for those who can relate.

I've been incarcerated since I was 17 and before I came into the knowledge of self I was a product of the mentality that I thought I originated. We all walked around with that same mentality, like everything we do now, the last generation of "real nig#as" didn't do before us.

Over my years of growing up, maturity and observing everything around me, I came to the conclusion that all this that we see is an illusion; from how we see ourselves, to how we see this so-called "game" and what we think is real.

A lot of us grow up in a condition surrounded by zombies; everybody in the family is a zombie, mother smoking drugs are untold and pops the same. Someone grows up with nothing, left to reflect only what's around him/her. Then we go to a school that doesn't even relate to us, that doesn't even acknowledge who we are as a people let alone try to relate to everything that we got to deal with before we even get to school, so a lot of us drop out.

When we grow up in a condition such as the one we grow up in, you are more emotional than anything. So from our emotions we do all our thinking, and those emotions just happened to be anger, pain, frustration hopelessness, etc. and that's what we live off of. If we are not emotional than we are living to fulfill our appetites, passions and desires so there is no control, we are emotionally scarred.

With these scarred emotions we'd run wild through life, we'd fall victim to our emotions and we'd base who we are on our past experience which was a tragedy.

Falling victim to that mentality comes the sense that can't nobody tell you nothing and you shouldn't let nobody tell you nothing when they have not been through what you been through or can't relate, but for those that can, take heed. Rebelliousness has become the characteristic of being a leader for us. Being rebellious doesn't make you a leader man, you're just rebellious. Just like you dudes that talk without thinking, that's the equivalent of shooting without aiming. A leader rises above his/her conditions, governs his/her emotions and he/she doesn't live for their own appetites, passions and desires. He/she humbles themselves, because they know enough and been through enough. Once you humble yourself you don't have to worry about being affected by the unforeseen influence about what people think about you because it doesn't apply to you.

When it's all said and done, the streets and the penitentiary walls will outlive us. We easily make it justifiable to be put in the grave or the penitentiary which you and I know what these people want and by the law, that's what they are going to get. I'm not talking just about man's law, but the law of attraction.

The law of attraction is unlike "attract and repel". We, being unlike the ones who are keeping us behind these walls, are what attracted us to the prison. When we choose to continue to be unlike, this is what keeps us in prison. The only way to repel from this reality is to become like the ones who build and keep us here, we have to become thinkers, builders and scientists. This is who we



Archibald J. Motely Jr., *The Liar*

are originally so that knowledge; our history didn't start here in America. Once you got the knowledge of self (KOS) you can learn to appreciate yourself. You need the knowledge of self, whether you choose to do good or bad. A lot of people are scared of this because of that unforeseen influence that isn't even real, or because with KOS comes responsibility.

There is no room for excuses when you knowledge or potential, being dumb isn't cool, man. If you are in school, trying to get your GED, or whatever get that out of the way. Stop using your past to destroy your future, looking for any excuse to drop out or give up. We are not built like that, we've been in the trenches all of our life, we are a strong as they come and we should reflect that in everything we do.

Educate yourself to invest in yourself. Carter G Woodson said "There are two educations that you can get, the one they give you and the one you give yourself". You don't have to walk around in a certain way. Malcolm X said "A wise man can play the clown, but the clown cannot play the wise man". Find your balance in everything that you do. We are bigger than just being street swallows on lands that we don't even own. We went from being original, to hidden, to just being a plain ol' mystery; a matter that remains unexplained. ■

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Cartoonist: Arkee

Layout & Design: Sal Barry

Intern: Shelia Martin

Mailing Address: Send submissions
and correspondences to:

Statesville Speaks
c/o Justice Studies
LWH 4062
Northeastern IL University
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625-4699

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CHOICES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

destroy an entire community and the special bonds family members have and the pleasant personalities of an individual. Eventually, it causes people to lose their dignity and their honor, religion, family, friends, health, sanity, income, freedom and their lives.

The only ways people stop using street drugs is either the person dies from an overdose, ends up in prison or the person who loves the feelings of belonging and being wanted, needed and loved by his or her family and friends, more than taking risks of possibly losing everyone and everything.

If someone's got any chance of surviving in the real world they need to take full advantage of the opportunity to go to school and they'll have to be serious about putting forth their best effort at becoming educated. Whatever you put your mind to do is yours. Just go at it 100% and you'll never loose. ■

WORTH CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

prevent the pitfall of incarceration, it would be knowledge of self. When a young person is given little, none or erroneous information about self, it depresses their view of themselves. It arrests their capacity for development and capability to adjust to life and adverse circumstances. Without accurate and complete knowledge of self, outside influences will come along and ignite a fire under negative beliefs, consuming the person. But often times not before it destroys everything around them, first. ■

GOALS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

Taking everything into consideration, what purpose does doing time in prison serve? More and more, without any type of rehabilitation and tougher, longer sentencing guidelines for offenders; prisons have become nothing more than warehouses for the convicted, serving only the purpose of retribution. What the society think? Are the individuals that have been convicted of criminal acts to return to civilization after they serve their time? Or would society rather throw them away like so much trash, keeping them incarcerated and washing their collective hands of the convicted criminals for good?

The lack of rehabilitative programs and the lack of concern for rehabilitation in general, coupled with the public's strictly punitive mentality, which seemingly contradict the mission of "corrections". The convicted individual either has the hope of returning to the world stripped from them or they have nothing to go home to, save the same situation that landed them in prison in the first place. In a country that was built upon the promise of the second chance, modern day society leaves little to no room for a convict's redemption. If the land of the free and the home of the brave is truly the pinnacle of civilization, perhaps we should do more as a whole to be more civilized, especially when it comes to the treatment of the incarcerated members of our population. ■

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