

The magazine of the
Northwestern Prison
Education Program

NORTHWESTERN INSIDER

VOL. 2, ISSUE 1



Art by Patty Ouska

To Our NPEP Community

The NPEP community grieves the profound loss of our beloved friend, classmate, and student, Katrina Giles. In the short time that Katrina was in NPEP, she filled the lives of everyone she touched with joy, hope, and care, and the light that burned so brightly in her will continue to illuminate all that we do moving forward.

In the months since Katrina's death, I have been deeply moved by the outpouring of memories shared about her from countless members of the NPEP community: about her unrivaled generosity, her unwavering friendship, her ability to really see and listen to others, her courage in the face of obstacles, her superhero levels of strength, and her irrepressible joy. More than one professor commented on her "insightfulness" and "radiance," and numerous classmates described her as "an angel" and the most "beautiful soul" on Earth.

Katrina inspired those around her to reflect the same love and kindness she brought to everything she touched. When she was first diagnosed with her illness, the NPEP community wrote so many letters on her behalf that her legal team was moved to tears, saying that they doubt anyone has ever received more support for a petition for release. Our collective efforts, combined with those of so many others, helped Katrina spend her last days at home surrounded by family members and friends. When her NPEP classmates at Sheridan heard about her death, they took the initiative to collectively create artwork, poetry, and words of encouragement to share with their Logan sisters. When her NPEP family at Logan organized a memorial, they shared music, and dance, and poetry, and stories — all of which made clear how deeply they knew and loved Katrina, and how much she impacted who they are today.

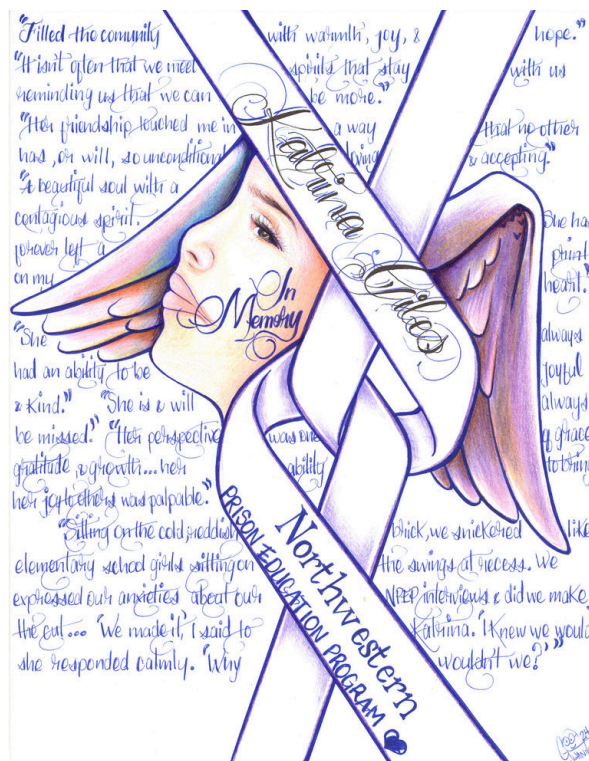
As you read the words in the coming pages, I invite you to honor and celebrate Katrina's life by reimagining what is possible when we lead with love and by relentlessly striving for a world that is more just and more compassionate.

With warmest wishes,

Jennifer Lackey

Director, Northwestern Prison Education Program





Behind the Canvas: 'In Loving Memory of Katrina Giles'

By Juan Garnica, NPEP student and artist

The idea for this drawing, "In Loving Memory of Katrina Giles," was born as my peers and I were walking to chow hall. We wanted to magnify how far Katrina's life could reach and show the beauty behind her story. She lives on forever through all of us who tell her story and keep her memory in our hearts. She will always be a part of the NPEP community.

The drawing incorporates paraphrases of quotations from Northwestern professors Jennifer Lackey, Jen Baker, and Marquis Bey, as well as NPEP students Erika Ray, Tiffany Fassler, Diandra Samuels, Shawnette Green, and Jeanine Elam — friends, peers, and family of Katrina Giles.

A Radiant Light, Gone Too Soon

On October 27, 2024, the NPEP community lost one of its own: NPEP student Katrina Giles. Her radiant presence has left an unforgettable mark. A member of the NPEP community for less than a year, Katrina's grace, gratitude, and joy touched everyone she encountered.

"Katrina's radiance was clear from the moment I met her," reflects Professor Jen Baker. "Her smile and energy could turn the mood in a room." Professor Marquis Bey adds, "She was beloved — kind, considerate, and thoughtful. Her writing and insights were extraordinary, and she will always be deeply missed."

Even before officially joining NPEP, Katrina's passion for learning shone when she worked alongside her friend and fellow student Tiffany Fassler. Once enrolled in NPEP, her work exhibited excellence and determination, even as her health declined.

On November 19, 2024, members of the Northwestern community gathered alongside the Logan cohort to honor Katrina's memory. The memorial featured freewriting inspired by her playlist, including "One Day at a Time" by Corey Smith. Classmate Elbonie Burnside shared how Katrina's joy touched everyone, while Katrina's partner, Lakisha Woodard, spoke of her resilience and love for her "Look at Me" family. A moving contemporary dance to Andra Day's "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free" reflected Katrina's spirit of strength and hope.

Katrina found peace and joy in gardening, a passion that will live on through a fundraiser to build a meditation garden at Logan in her honor. To support this effort, visit the GoFundMe website and search "Honoring Katrina: Building a Meditation Garden for Survivors."

Katrina was a beautiful soul whose kindness and light will never be forgotten. The community is grateful that she was released from Logan and able to spend her last days at home surrounded by her family and friends.

Her legacy of love, resilience, and hope will continue to inspire the NPEP community and beyond.

Sincerely,
The Logan Community

Memories That Endure

Over the next few pages, NPEP students and those who knew Katrina share their heartfelt memories.

The Butterfly Effect

A poem in remembrance of a dear friend and classmate, Katrina.

The wings are a fluorescent green.
Shades of blue and orange illuminate its soul
And improve its ability to smell, hear, feel the company it is attracting.
The constant fluttering resembles the everlasting laughter that penetrates the ears—
a contagious giggle amongst its loved ones and peers.
Never allowing occupied space, filled with cruelty and desperation from time lost, to clip
the pennons that help propel its life beyond the barbed wire.
A seasonal life span adjudicated and determined ... a farce.
The universe has offered its own conclusion—
life amongst family is the proper solution,
Everlasting.

— *Elbonie Burnside*

Unnecessary Jitters

Sitting on the cold, reddish brick, we snickered like elementary school girls sitting on the swings at recess. We expressed our anxieties about NPEP interviews — did we think we made the cut? Caramel and vanilla smiles of happiness unite us with the first cohort for the 2023 winter classes.

“We made it!” I said to Katrina.

“I knew we would,” she responded calmly. “Why wouldn’t we?”

— *Jeanine Elam*

My friend Katrina...

was surprisingly funny. Her quick wits could put a smile on anyone's face. Her playful demeanor is just one of the countless qualities I'll miss. She was understanding and wise beyond her years. She was great at offering advice. Her favorite words of wisdom were "Don't worry. It will all work out." She'd complete a project just hours before it was due, but in the end, just as she said, it all worked out.

One of the last group projects we did in our Leadership Principles class was to choose two influential leaders and prepare a presentation identifying leadership traits. Our group of three chose leaders no one would expect. The first was Nero, a Roman emperor; we figured he couldn't have been all bad. The second was a fictional character who was, nonetheless, a great leader — Mufasa, the Lion King.

About two weeks before our project was to be presented, Katrina's housing unit was quarantined due to cases of COVID. Luckily for us, no one else tested positive on her unit, the quarantine was over on the day of the presentation, and Katrina showed up for class. She excitedly produced a huge poster board with full descriptions of our two chosen leaders' attributes and an array of their photos. Vanecha and I were shocked.

Katrina had the perfect excuse to sit back. Instead, she did everything in her power to remain part of the team. Everyone loved the presentation, and we were given a well-deserved A. Her words of wisdom rang loud and true in this instance: "Don't worry, it'll all work out."

Katrina's favorite Bible verse was Philippians 4:6-7: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heads and minds through Christ Jesus."

— *Margaret DeFrancisco*

If you knew the Katrina Giles that I knew, then you would probably agree she wouldn't want her loved ones to be sad in her wake but to be celebrating her memories instead! Katrina has always played a major role in the lives of her friends and family because she was such a star. Now Katrina's burning star and every memory we have of her will be etched on our hearts forever.

— *Tenisa Carter*

Katrina

Katrina Giles is to me
like the most colorful leaf on the tree.

She is the brightest part of the sun,
always there when I need someone.

Even in her pain and suffering,
she was still the one
doing the comforting.

I will forever believe she was on this earth
an angel in disguise.
She was unusually special; you could see it in her eyes.

Her friendship touched me in a way that no other has,
in a way that no other will,
so loving, accepting and unconditional.

Katrina Giles to me
is a prime example
of everything we should strive to be.

I will always remember and love you, Katrina!
May you be at peace now.
Save a spot on our friends' couch for me.

— *Tiffany Fassler*



Katrina

Katrina was a beautiful soul. Her spirit was contagious. Whenever I was around her, she had a smile on her face, and you couldn't help but smile too. She was a complete angel, and she has forever left a print on my heart. She will be missed, but her memory will be forever.

— Diandra 'Dion' Samuels

Trina's Memory

Trina's memory will always be alive in my heart. She was a positive light wherever she went. She would brighten anyone's day, a true definition of sunshine. She was always full of love and joy. I am blessed to have known her.

— Latosha Howard

For Katrina

It is not often that we meet spirits like yours—spirits that stay with us, reminding us that we can be more. Dear friend and sister, as our hearts ache, you have taught us to love still. Your laughter, your smile, your willingness to try will be missed.

We will speak your name in all spaces. We will speak your name with love and sincerity.

Rest in power dear friend.

— Erika Ray

Kind-Hearted

Adventurous

Tough

Rare

Intelligent

Noble

Angel

My dear friend Katrina, thank you for being there when I needed a shoulder to cry on. Thank you for all the good times and fun memories we were able to make in this dark place. You are and will always be a bright light in this dark world. You may be gone, but you will never be forgotten. I love you, friend.

— K. Wright

Trina

You are the most beautiful soul to have walked the earth, and I am honored to have been your friend. We met in a low place, but we found a true friendship and formed a tight bond — one that cannot be broken and no one can take away. The lives you have touched are countless. Your kind heart and soft spirit had a way of bringing a peaceful calm to everyone around you.

Your strength is something I will always admire. When the world was crashing around you, you still stood strong, wanting to make sure everyone else was okay. I've been replaying some of our most recent conversations over and over in my mind, and I can say they have been the deepest and most heartfelt talks we've had — raw and uncut, vulnerability at its finest! I will carry those with me forever!

Thank you for letting me be a part of your world. Thank you for always being my voice of reason when nothing around me made sense. I love you. I miss you. I promise to always carry you in my heart.

— *Shawnette Green*

When I met Katrina Giles at work, I knew she was special. Her positive spirit radiated in everything she did. It wasn't until I got to know her more personally that I found out how jubilant she actually was. Happy and triumphant are the perfect words to describe Trina during her life. What makes her even more impressive was that she stayed the same way, even during the darkest times.

I aspire to be half of the woman Trina was, and if I can accomplish that, then I will have accomplished so many things to celebrate. Personally, I have not always been astute when choosing who to have in my life and who to keep around me. With Trina, I hit the lottery! I gained a person who received and gave intelligent conversation; I gained a teacher and a mentor; I shared many beautiful moments and memories with her; and in my heart these things have not been lost in her passing. The loyalty and respect she has shown to me have earned her a permanent place at my table. Forever I miss her, love her, and cherish her. I appreciate her for being herself and never having a negative word or action toward anyone.

Trina, thank you for blessing me by being a part of my life.

— *Savannah Weiss*

What Does Love Look Like?

What does love look like? It looks like what Katrina Giles displayed every day: kindness, caring, thoughtfulness, and much compassion toward others. I never witnessed an angel walk this earth until meeting her. Katrina contributed so much to other people's lives. She loved to offer help and support people in a way that they knew she was there. It was clear that Katrina was a walking vessel from the pages of the good book, the Bible. Everyone felt welcome when they met her. She understood we were all at different places and stages in life. She met you where you were, with no judgment. You were able to feel comfortable in her presence.

Katrina knew who she was, and she took pride in everything she did. She loved to learn on a daily basis. She was grateful for each day she woke up. She always formulated a plan and brought it to fruition — even to her last days on Earth. Katrina was OK with God's plan. Katrina's journey was fulfilled, and it was her time to receive her angel wings.

We have all been affected by Katrina's situation, which came out of nowhere. She brought so much hope into our lives.

I carry you in my heart all day and every day and love you forever.

— Lakisha Woodard

Remembering Katrina

I was thoroughly blessed by Katrina's presence. Even though I didn't get enough time with her to build a deeper friendship, I feel privileged to have had the time I did with her. Before she became my classmate, I'd always see her smiling and in a good mood. Once she became a classmate, I cherished the time we spent together in class.

Katrina ("Trina," for short), Margie, and I always worked together on projects, and Trina had a great sense of humor and fun. In Professor Baker's Leadership Principles class, we were assigned to research a leader, and Margie chose Nero, the Roman emperor, for our group. When reading the research, we found some interesting and non-flattering details from Nero's life that Trina and I wanted to include but Margie did not. So Trina and I made a pact to sneak the information into the presentation. Throughout the presentation, we kept "slipping," sharing the scandalous information with the class. Trina enjoyed making the class laugh.

Trina was an absolute special gem. I called her my Sunshine. Her smiling spirit and joyful presence always lit up a room and brought a calm to the atmosphere. I will indeed miss you and treasure our time. Thank you for the laughter and love.

— Vanecha Cooper

In Memory of Katrina, From Her NPEP Brothers

Our hearts weep, as we have suffered yet another loss of one of our beloved community members. It is not easy to deal with or overcome grief, especially when the grief comes with losing somebody who you love and who was close to you. Everybody deals with it in their own way and in their own time. It is in this moment that we stand in solidarity with our sisters at Logan as they mourn the loss of Katrina. We want our sisters to know that they are not alone. We support our sisters. We are each other's strength, in the good times and bad.

We share these thoughts and prayers. A community that's united can never be divided.

Please stay strong. Be strong for each other. Celebrate Katrina in all that she meant to you — her joy, her peace, her smile, her grace. Carry her in all that you do, and trust that she will be an angel watching over you.

— Jamal Jones (Cincere Knowledge), Cohort 4

My thoughts and prayers go out to Katrina's classmates, family, and friends. Stay strong! Stay together.

— Abdul-Malik Muhammad, Cohort 1

The most treasured gift we give the world is our presence. Having seen some of the sisters' comments about who they knew you to be, you were a treasure. Blessings.

— Mark "Yohanon" Dixon, Cohort 2

As a member of NPEP and Katrina's brother's friend, I extend my condolences to the family and Logan cohort.

— Unsigned

Love, support, and respect for your family. In solidarity.

— Juan Garnica, Cohort 5

There are times like this in which family is the most important thing needed. I consider all NPEP members and their families to be family. Our hearts and prayers are with you in this time of loss. Be encouraged and strengthened.

— *Unsigned*

Dear Logan students: I am sorry for your loss, and I hope you all are maintaining your strength so that you all can continue to make a positive impact on current and future students. I didn't know Katrina, but I do know she would want you all to strive for greatness.

— *Tevin Louis, Cohort 3*

Condolences. Many of us understand and relate to such loss and the feelings it brings. All I can say is to be strong and don't try to rush past these feelings. Don't ignore them. Don't pretend they aren't there. Own them. Embrace them. And do all you can to remember the bright spots she brought to everyone she touched.

— *Ian Valencia, Cohort 4*

Hearing about Katrina's passing was sad, but hearing about her character gave me joy. The impact she had on everyone around her during difficult times truly exemplified "agape." I wish I could have met her, and one day I will. I send my love and condolences to the family and know that we are praying for you.

— *Oliver Crawford, Cohort 4*

Though I did not personally know Katrina, I relate with her struggles. She was a member of our family, a sister who I will never meet. My deepest sorrow to those who knew her and suffered the pain of her loss.

— *Unsigned*

I want to send my deepest and most heartfelt condolences to Katrina's family. I feel that all of NPEP are family. As such, we lost a valuable family member. I wish that the family finds comfort in knowing the love that we as a community have for Katrina.

— *Scot Miller, Cohort 4*

Although I never met Katrina personally, my heart still goes out to her and her family. One thing I recognize is that Katrina was a part of our community, and she will be sorely missed. Katrina's brother, Tim, is a friend who I recently met during my stay at Stateville, and I pray for their family and the vacancy that is left behind due to Katrina's loss. My heart goes out to all who are affected by this current tragedy.

— *Chris Douglas, Cohort 3*

It is extremely heartbreaking to hear about Katrina's passing, but what was rewarding was the impact on the people who she touched, not only at NPEP but in life in general. Rise in triumph.

— *Ramon "Ben Khayil" Montague, Cohort 2*

Peace & blessings. I send my condolences to you all, our sisters in arms. Stay strong, keep your faith in who you are, and know that without struggle there is no progress.

— *Darvin Henderson, Cohort 5*

Sending you all my warmth, love, and prayers during these hard times. She may be gone, but we can make sure she is never forgotten.

— *Mohammad Salahat, Cohort 5*

The transition of Katrina is heartbreaking but gives us an opportunity to build on and appreciate her memory. You have my best regards.

— *Brandon V. Wyatt, Cohort 2*

These tragic happenings are never easy to deal with. However, we know Katrina would still want us to live life and grow, so — in her honor — that is what I will do. Peace, love, and godspeed!

— *Jason Samuels, Cohort 5*

As much as we can, we are sending all the love and support we have your way.

— *Giovanni Rios, Cohort 5*

I pray that God comforts you all as well as Katrina's family with His abundant love, mercy, and grace. All of you are in my prayers!

— *Dahnyah Williams, Cohort 5*

My heart goes out to the family of Katrina and all my sisters of the NPEP community. I love you! Stay strong.

— *Unsigned*

Unfortunately, I understand what y'all are going through. This is the time to lean and depend on each other — now more than ever. Continue to keep the happy memories and the joyous moments on the forefront of your mind and hold Katrina in your hearts. It helps.

— *DeWayne Robinson, Cohort 4*

My thoughts and prayers go out to you and all those affected by what has transpired. Peace and blessings.

— *Rommell Winters, Cohort 5*

I am sorry for your loss. It is easy to say everything will be alright, but trust the process, knowing you all have us behind you.

— *Paul Forbes, Cohort 4*

May Katrina's memory be a blessing.

— *Patrick Comi, Cohort 5*

I send my condolences to the family and please understand that the NPEP community will continue to shine bright in the memory of Katrina. We heard that she was a wonder and meant nothing but goodness.

— *Donnell Green, Cohort 3*

So sad. My thoughts, prayers, and love are with you all.

— *Unsigned*

FOR KATRINA

Inside Logan's health care unit, Katrina Giles fought for her life — and her freedom.

By Erika Ray



Hospital rooms often fill our senses with the security of cleanliness and structure. The smell of bleach, the pressed white sheets, and the pastel colors uniformly featured on each wall embolden patients and visitors to remain calm as a battle between illness and will transpires.

In prisons, the cells allotted for health care purposes are not truly intended for use on winter days, when the outside temperatures are below zero. The heating system might be broken. Food must be brought from different buildings, so it is cold when it arrives to patients, and access to phones, televisions, or electronic devices is restricted. When an incarcerated person meets with Wexford Health Sources, IDOC's health care provider, or onsite doctors for medical treatment, the patient is required to stay in one of these cells. Sadly, patients are aware of the lack of care and the inhumane treatment awaiting them.

So, upon entering the cell assigned to Katrina Giles, you might not be surprised as I describe the unfinished concrete floor she had to walk across in order to use the restroom, the thin prison mattress provided by IDOC for her to sleep on, and the paint-chipped walls and door separating her from the general population at Logan Correctional Center.

Katrina's presence provoked love, humility, and appreciation as I entered her cell alongside fellow NPEP classmates and friends Elbonie Burnside and Margaret DeFrancisco. The health care administrator allowed us to visit Katrina and ask her questions about the status of her health and her hopes for the future. We learned that Katrina and her legal team filed a petition for medical clemency and that Katrina's father made adjustments to his home so that he could care for her in her last days. Over the course of several visits, we asked her a barrage of questions.

“In an environment where devastation is the norm, a warrior like Katrina who battled fear and illness shows us that we must always demand, command, and nurture hope within ourselves and each other.”

“What’s your diagnosis? When did you start feeling sick? Did you notify staff, and how did they respond? What standard of care are you receiving?” On and on we went, talking between questions, laughing at each other’s jokes, and giving her space to eat lunch and get some rest when she needed it.

Through the many questions we asked Katrina, one of her answers will always stay with me. I asked her, “What is your biggest fear?” Katrina responded, “Dying in this cell.”

“If I die here, I’ll never be free,” she continued. “You guys will get to go home, but people will always say that’s the room where Katrina died. People won’t want to be housed in this room. The stigma of ‘she died in here’ will never go away.”

Katrina’s response left a frigid silence in the air. Breaking through the silence was J. Cole’s song “The Climb Back” blaring through her small headphones that were plugged into my GTL tablet. “Everything comes back around full circle...”

I thought, is this a full circle moment? Does anyone deserve to have a life encircled by domestic, sexual, or institutional violence? Should anyone have to fear a death that is trapped inside four corners of decay?

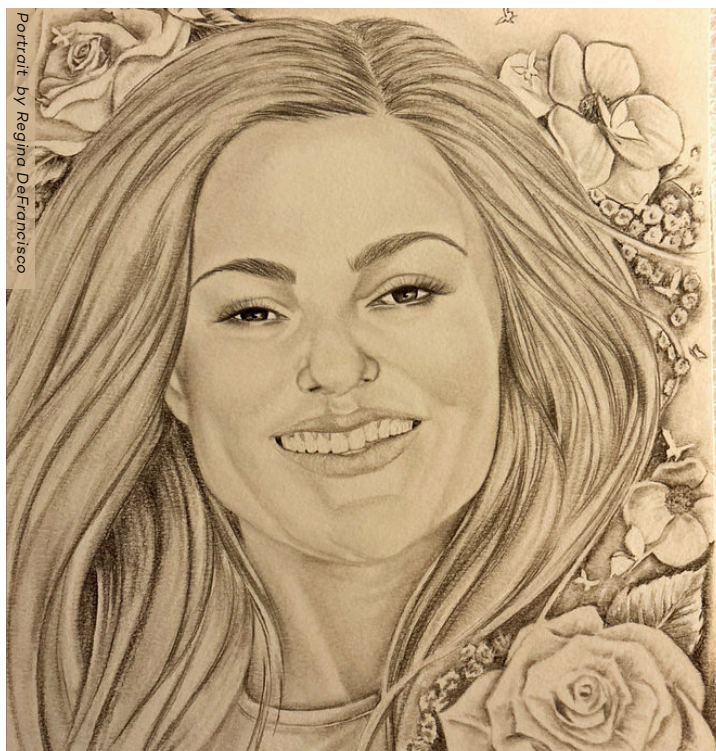
My eyes shifted to the window behind Katrina, and I asked her whether she ever looks out of her cell window. She answered, “No.” I asked her, “Why not?” She responded, “I don’t know.” Without a doubt, Katrina’s determination to be free was connected to her resistance to looking out of the window.

After two attempts, Katrina was granted medical clemency. She was able to go home to her father and live out the remainder of her life feeling loved and supported. The hard truth is that I’m sure in many ways she feared death. I’m sure she feared leaving her partner, leaving her father, and losing her dreams of a second chance. The complexities of fear are layered through an experience like Katrina’s, but hope repudiates fear.

Katrina’s resilience and willingness to hope have inspired us all. In an environment where devastation is the norm, a warrior like Katrina who battled fear and illness shows us that we must always demand, command, and nurture hope within ourselves and each other. Now when I walk past the health care unit, I look up at the window of Katrina’s old cell, and I see lipstick prints. Kisses she planted on the glass before her final goodbye to Logan’s health care unit. ▀

In Loving Memory: Katrina Giles

A legacy of grace, strength, and inspiration.





Photos by Monika Wnuk



“Katrina Giles to me is a prime example of everything we should strive to be.”

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To Our NPEP Community

“... these walls we build in our minds and hearts make sense when we don’t know any better — the more walls we build around ourselves, the less space we have to grow and be free ...” — Yung Pueblo

A tutor once told me, “It’s okay to not be okay.” At the time, I didn’t understand the meaning behind the phrase. In this issue of the *Northwestern Insider*, one of our focuses is on health and wellness and the effects it has on the members of the NPEP community. With our publication, we provide a platform for NPEP members to express themselves and bring awareness to their physical and mental wellness.

One of the biggest challenges faced by most NPEP community members is trying to find the balance between being a student and an incarcerated resident. As NPEP alumni and students, we’re allotted the privileges of education and community. For two to three days a week, for three hours per day, we’re allowed to escape from the harsh reality of confinement. Our cages are replaced by classrooms, our steel bars are replaced by bookshelves, and our peers are replaced with outside civilians who help and support us academically and emotionally.

Education is our safe haven — but what happens when that space becomes tainted? When three hours feel like one, or when three days of school are cut down to one or none? What happens when academics are overshadowed by poor living conditions, inadequate health care, and de facto life sentences? Our mental health becomes compromised, and our role as students or alumni feels more like a burden than a blessing.

The contributors to the health and wellness section of this issue offer an in-depth look into the trauma and obstacles that the NPEP community faces on a regular basis. In these pages, we tell our stories.

When it’s all said and done, we’re not making excuses. Instead, we’ve embraced the pressure and cherish the opportunity of receiving a higher education, while building a community that’s centered around love and reconciliation. At the end of the day, “It’s okay to not be okay.”

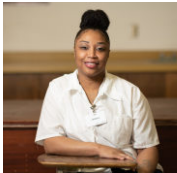
Best wishes,

Tony Triplett, on behalf of the Northwestern Insider editorial team

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CONTRIBUTORS

Below, and on the following page, are contributors for Vol. 2, Issue 1 of the *Northwestern Insider*.



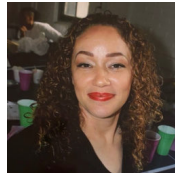
**ELBONIE
BURNSIDE**

Elbonie is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center.



D.C. CRITE

D.C. is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote "Running Scared" and drew "Signed in Blood."



**MARGARET
DEFRANCISCO**

Margaret is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She drew "Sunset."



MARK DIXON

Mark is a student in NPEP's second cohort. He wrote "Forgive and Forget — Or Just Move On?"



YAPHET DAVIS

Yaphet is a student in NPEP's fourth cohort. He wrote "The Legal System's Role in Perpetuating Disparities."



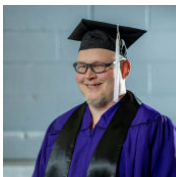
BRYAN DEAN

Bryan is a student in NPEP's second cohort. He wrote "Pressure Valve."



EDMOND DUFFIN

Edmond is a student in NPEP's second cohort. He drew "Unfinished."



**ANTHONY
EHLERS**

Anthony is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote "Uncertain Waters."



**JEANINE
ELAM**

Jeanine is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She wrote "Logan Students Perform in 'Look at Me: Raise Your Hand.'"



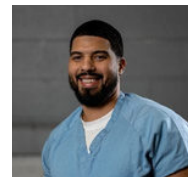
PAUL FORBES

Paul is a student in NPEP's fourth cohort. He wrote "How Are We to Judge Policing in Urban Communities?"



**MIGUELANGEL
GARCIA**

Miguel is a student in NPEP's third cohort. He drew "Student at the Bus Stop."



JASON GORHAM

Jason is a student in NPEP's third cohort. He drew several illustrations, including those for "The Toll of Survivor's Guilt" and "Mirrors."



DONNELL GREEN

Donnell is a student in NPEP's third cohort. He wrote several pieces, including "A Survivor's Guilt."



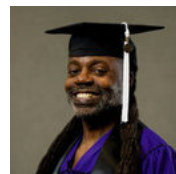
LYNN GREEN

Lynn is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote several pieces, including an interview with State Senator Rachel Ventura.



JAMES HALE

James is a student in NPEP's fourth cohort. He wrote "The Psychological Effects of Solitary Confinement."



CRAIG HARVEY

Craig is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote "The Last Goodbye."



**JAMAL JONES
(CINCERE KNOWLEDGE)**

Jamal is a student in NPEP's fourth cohort. He wrote "Will the Suffering Ever End?"



**MICHAEL
JORGENSEN**

Michael is a student in NPEP's fourth cohort. He wrote several articles, including "Life, Death, and a DNR."

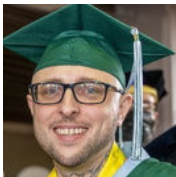
Interested in contributing to
future issues of the
Northwestern Insider?

Refer to our
submission guidelines
on page 118.



TEVIN LOUIS

Tevin is a student in NPEP's third cohort. He wrote "12 Years of Survivor's Guilt."



**TODD
MANDOLINE**

Todd is a student in NPEP's second cohort. He wrote "Mommy, Help!"



JOYCE MCGEE

Joyce is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She wrote an interview with Dr. Marquis Bey.



FLY MILLER

Fly is a 2024 NPEP graduate. He wrote "Paycheck to Paycheck."



**RAMON "BEN KHAYIL"
MONTAGUE**

Ramon is a student in NPEP's second cohort. He wrote "Slave Patrols & Modern-Day Policing."



**ABDUL-MALIK
MUHAMMAD**

Malik is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote and edited the restorative justice column.



HUGO OCON

Hugo is a student in NPEP's third cohort. He drew "Still Dreaming."



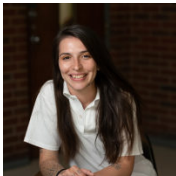
PATTY OUSKA

Patty is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She painted the cover art and drew "Domestic Violence..."



WILLIAM PEEPLES

William is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote "Forgiveness & Grace."



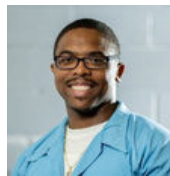
CHELSEA RAKER

Chelsea is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She wrote "Shackles."



ERIKA RAY

Erika is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She wrote several pieces, including "Inside of Rigidly Cogent Binary Illusions."



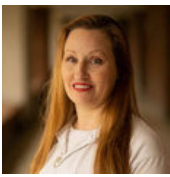
**DEWAYNE
ROBINSON**

DeWayne is a student in NPEP's fourth cohort. He drew "My Truth."



**BONNIE D.
SHELESNY**

Bonnie is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She drew "Small and Disposable."



**CINDY
SHEPHEARD-
ROBINETTE**

Cindy is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She drew "My Universe."



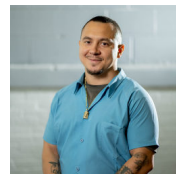
BLANCA SOLIS

Blanca is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She drew "Amor."



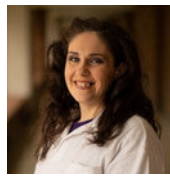
TONY TRIPLETT

Tony is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote several pieces, including "The Lady Behind The Lens."



IAN VALENCIA

Ian is a student in NPEP's fourth cohort. He wrote "Black, Brown, and State Blues."



MELINDA WARFEL

Melinda is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She drew "My Reason to Live."

Health & Wellness

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I recently lost a friend to cancer. We weren't best friends, but we were close enough to know each other's likes and dislikes, give well wishes, and explore unending possibilities about the future with one another. The cancer she was diagnosed with was a rare adrenocortical carcinoma.

Losing someone while incarcerated has its challenges, especially the unnerving thought that the person's passing would have been preventable if a better health care system were in place for our vulnerable population. The following question has been etched into my head since the day she was diagnosed: Could she have lived if the doctors had caught it sooner? It seems to be a fair question, and it has haunted my existence each day since her passing because I will never know the answer.

In addition, I am not able to truly process and express the emotions traveling through my body. Anger, sadness, confusion, and more anger are roads I continue to travel, but these are emotions I am not allowed to dwell on because my captivity captures not only my body but also my mind.

Displaying vulnerability would give people with prying eyes the opportunity to take advantage of what they may consider weakness. Employees will view it as insolence and will issue disciplinary infractions if they judge your display of emotion to be out of compliance.

The reality is that true camaraderie is not allowed or supported; so it comes as no surprise when no commemoration is held for my dear friend. The observance of her life falls to her community instead of the institution. It makes grieving harder to endure.

How can a person truly grieve when the institution prevents them from experiencing their true emotions? I cope by eventually turning to myself, taking comfort in isolation, and praying that the feelings I am restricted from displaying will not have a lasting effect on my mental health and existence.

I have come to realize that grief and captivity can be a dangerous combination. ▀

GRIEF & CAPTIVITY

A dangerous combination.

By Elbonie Burnside



RUNNING SCARED

Confronting trauma, healing, and mental illness.

By D.C. Crite

I've been clocked at 10.19 seconds in the 100-meter dash. I've rushed for nearly 1,900 yards in a single season on the gridiron. I've outrun a lot of people and avoided lots of obstacles.

Some may believe that I used my athletic ability to showcase my talents, but I saw the track and football field as places of refuge. Just as I used my helmet to protect my head, I used sports to hide and run from what I feared and never understood: mental illness.

I've suffered from PTSD and depression for a long time, and for a long time I refused to deal with it. I remember hearing a quote, "You can't defeat what you don't face." With mental health and mental illness, this holds true.

Like most men, especially Black men, I was far too embarrassed to face the truth that, mentally, I wasn't okay and I needed help. I masked my shortcomings and issues by fleeing to the field. This was my way of self-medicating to soothe the pain. I could bury my pain and secrets in the deepest, darkest corners of my mind, praying that they would lie dormant and never reawaken. However, mental illness doesn't operate like that. My issues would rise from the grave like Lazarus.

In my darkest time, my tears fell, my thoughts raced, and I contemplated ending it all. I wanted explanations for my uncontrollable anger and extreme highs and lows.

The explanations seemed elusive to me until I began to inventory my life's many traumatizing experiences. Never dealing with discovering a dead body in a runoff ditch — this mattered. Watching my mother being physically and verbally abused, and

suffering my own abuse and feeling helpless about it, mattered. A tour of duty in the U.S. Navy mattered.

These mattered because the pain and memories from these events mattered: the night sweats, nightmares, constant anger, and severe depression. Since age seven, I've been running scared, trying to keep up the score. After tallying it up, I realized that mental illness was way ahead.

I finally found the courage to be vulnerable. I reached out to a mental health professional. I began to discuss the things that I was afraid to face. I began to understand my mental illness. I began to catch up with the disease. I began to heal.

Will I ever defeat my mental illness? I honestly don't know. What I have learned is that running neck and neck with PTSD and depression is no small feat.

"There's a reason windshields are bigger than rearview mirrors." This quote didn't resonate with me before, but now I understand it. I'm learning to deal with what's ahead and regret what's in my past as little as possible.

Are you hesitant to face what you fear? If you continue to avoid and outrun the problem, you'll tire and eventually fall behind. It's okay to say you're not okay.

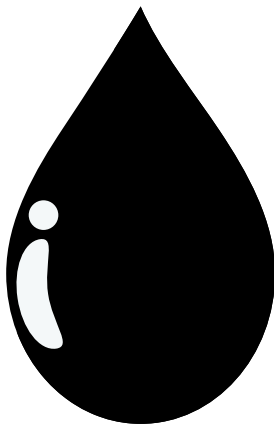
I used to be fast and elusive. I've outrun and avoided many challenges in my life except one: mental illness.

I've caught up to it by dealing with it, and right now, catching up to it and managing it have been growth enough for me. ▀

UNCERTAIN WATERS

*Drinking water in Illinois
prisons is a crapshoot.*

By Anthony Ehlers



As Chicago lays the groundwork for a new casino, people imprisoned in Illinois gamble with their health every time they take a drink of water.

When most people think of places with poor drinking water, images of impoverished and underdeveloped countries spring to mind. That's why the tragedy of Flint, Michigan, was so shocking: people wondered how that could happen in the United States. But it's not uncommon. In 2023, *The Guardian* reported that more than 25 million Americans drink from contaminated water.

Some of those people were at Stateville Correctional Center, which had a long history of contaminants. (The prison closed in 2024.)

"I've been hearing about contaminated water for years from prisoners," Alan Mills, executive director of the Uptown People's Law Center, told *The Appeal* in March 2024. Mills also noted that prisoners have complained that the water is often brown, sometimes smells like sewage, and has black flecks in it.

Stateville was built in the 1920s, and its infrastructure — including the plumbing — is crumbling. Prisoners worry that its pipes contain lead and that corrosion is the reason for the brown water. The prisoners' complaints about discolored and strange-tasting water have been on record with the Uptown People's Law Center since 2013.

In spring of 2024, IDOC and the Illinois Department of Public Health announced that *Legionella* bacteria were detected at Stateville. It was later revealed that water in five other prisons had also tested positive for the bacteria.

Shari Stone-Mediatore, managing director of Parole Illinois, told *The Appeal* in April 2024 that she was "appalled that the IDOC seems to be more concerned with covering up the problem than with protecting the health of the people in their custody."

On March 5, 2024, *Legionella* bacteria were found in one empty cell in C-House at Stateville, where I lived. Inspectors did not test any of the inhabited cells, nor did they test the showers, a known breeding ground for *Legionella*. Aaron Packman, director of the Northwestern Center for Water Research, told *The Appeal* that contaminated showers are "a big concern."

The showers were not tested at Stateville or at any of the other prisons.

Janet E. Stout, a microbiologist at the University of Pittsburgh and the president and director of the Special Pathogens Laboratory, which specializes in *Legionella* detection and control, told *The Appeal* that inspectors need to test multiple locations at a site to understand the full scale of the bacteria's spread.

But water testing at Stateville was haphazard at best. In 2024, the *Chicago Reader* reported that the company responsible for lead testing Stateville's water did not follow federal guidelines.

Two months after that report, we were finally told *Legionella* had been found in our drinking water. There were claims that the system was flushed several times; however, *Legionella* bacteria grow in showerheads and faucets, as well as in stagnant water such as in the wells that are the source of our water. They began distributing bottled water daily — yet the water was not purified as IDOC claimed but came from a facility also found to contain *Legionella*. They only allowed two 20-ounce bottles per person, which is not enough water to meet the basic needs of roughly 2,200 men inside Stateville.

This is how the IDOC cares for those of us in prison.



This particular issue is not new: Illinois prisons have a long history of providing contaminated drinking water to prisoners. One person at Stateville was diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease in 2015, and in 2020 two prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center contracted it. While it is treatable, one in 10 people who get sick with Legionnaires' disease will die. It is especially deadly to people over age 50, current or former smokers, and those with underlying illnesses.

Legionella bacteria are just one in a long list of problems faced by prisoners and their drinking water. From the 1990s through the mid-2000s, the water at Stateville contained high levels of lithium and more than twice the level of radium permitted by federal guidelines. In 2000, the EPA reported that the prison was violating federal limits for radium in the water; it took Stateville three years to achieve compliance with those limits.

The IDOC and the prison administration have long known the health risks associated with the drinking water at Stateville. Several years ago, an internal memo revealed that IDOC advised all staff not to drink the water at Stateville and provided employees with bottled water. The prisoners were never informed of the health risks of consuming the water, and because the prisoners were never provided with bottled water, they were unable to protect themselves. For years, IDOC knew the water was bad and posed health risks. They kept silent.

Local activists have been calling for greater oversight of the state's prisons, urging the Illinois Department of Public Health to create a task force to monitor and investigate contaminated water in prison.

“How can people in prison feel like they can be productive members of society when they don't even feel human? Dogs in animal shelters are given clean water and good food full of all the vitamins and nutrients needed to ensure they are healthy.”

Jennifer Vollen-Katz, the executive director of the John Howard Association, told *Injustice Watch* that more oversight "is critical to improving the sanitation, hygiene, and safety issues that are rife within Illinois facilities." IDOC cannot be trusted to conduct the testing or reveal the results. Oversight must come from an outside agency.

How can people in prison feel like they can be productive members of society when they don't even feel human? Dogs in animal shelters are given clean water and good food full of all the vitamins and nutrients needed to ensure they are healthy. IDOC feeds us a diet below nutritional standards, with food that is old, stale, and sometimes rotten. Dogs at a shelter are walked every day. We get to go outside twice a week, and only if enough staff show up to run the yard. If dogs were given contaminated and potentially deadly water, protesters would line the streets. We are given contaminated and potentially deadly water every day, and the state does not care. Our water is bad not only for our physical health but for our mental health as well.

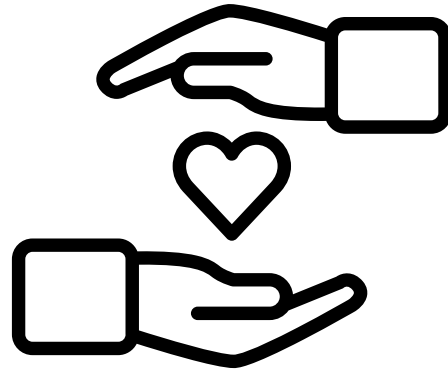
Incarcerated individuals know that they're valued less than a dog. Fresh, reliable drinking water is a basic human right — one that most people take for granted.

Imagine how it feels to gamble with your health and your life every time you're thirsty. No one should have to worry about dying from their drinking water. The real casino is right here in IDOC. It is truly a crapshoot every time we drink the water. We gamble every day. ▀

THE LAST GOODBYE

*Hospice experiences from
within Stateville Correctional
Center.*

By Craig Harvey



The topic of life and death can be difficult to discuss among healthy people in a free society. However, it is almost a taboo discussion in a prison society, where some will die and many are unhealthy. So, when it comes to writing this piece, I have struggled like a one-year-old taking their first steps. The struggle is one filled with the pain of those who passed away.

In 2019, I began an assignment in Stateville's health care unit, where I unofficially worked in hospice care. I say "unofficially" because there was no formal training or acknowledgment from the staff for the work I did until the pandemic. Before the pandemic, my motivation for working in hospice was inspired by my own past traumas.

Many of the men I sat with reminded me of my grandparents, who both passed away when I was 13 years old. My grandmother lived the final seven years of her life confined to a wheelchair due to paralysis of the entire left side of her body. My grandfather spent his final days with both legs amputated due to his alcoholism. So, in a sense, I was a hospice worker for my grandparents when I was a child.

My approach to working in hospice care while incarcerated was to repair and restore my relationship with humanity. Failing to properly heal from my own trauma caused me to hurt others. The environment infected me to the point that my mere presence was like an infectious disease to the community I came from. At some point during my incarceration, I began to heal, and my goal became

not to be a product of my environment, but instead to create an environment out of who I am. Instead of producing more trauma, I wanted to produce healing.

On my very first day working in the health care unit in the summer of 2019, I was thrown fresh out of the frying pan and into the fire. My shift began at 1:30 p.m., and around 3:30 p.m., a Code 3 was announced over the radio. In an instant, it was complete pandemonium.

The nurses and med-techs were running around gathering medical supplies: first-aid kits, defibrillators, a gurney. Doors were locked as the health care workers were instructed to remain in the infirmary. Within minutes, I observed five nurses push a gurney carrying an unresponsive Black male, with one nurse on top of him operating a chest compression device. After about 20 minutes, administrators, nurses, the coroner, and a few unidentified suits with internal affairs filled the room. Their body language was easy to read: Sam M. is dead!

I did not cry for Sam's demise in that moment because I only knew him at a distance. Also, that entire scene was similar to the trauma I was all too familiar with and that I learned to cope with but not heal from. My healing process began on that day, and my greatest emotional breakdown came when a man suffering from two cancers passed away in prison because he had no place to live.

His name was Don B. He was short, and his complexion was kissed by the sun. He had no problem flashing a smile, which highlighted that he had almost no teeth — just three or four randomly positioned in his mouth. I can't help but chuckle to myself as I envision his smile in this moment. Also, because of his stomach cancer, he had a hernia in his stomach that made it look as if someone inside him was trying to punch through his stomach. As grotesque as it may have appeared, my goal was to ensure that he felt comfortable around me instead of insecure about his appearance.

Mr. B grew up on the West Side of Chicago during the '60s and '70s, so much of his dialogue sounded like a Blaxploitation movie script. I'd greet him like: "What's up, old-timer?" He would reply: "What's happenin', baby? Dig, when you get a few ticks, put some heat on this water for me, roadie." This was part of our daily routine, even though developing a routine was difficult because he had trouble remembering — a result of his brain cancer. Some days he would even forget how to talk, and whatever he was attempting to articulate would translate into mumbles and almost childlike gibberish. Amazingly, even on those bad days, he never forgot his childhood address in the 50-something hundreds of West Jackson Boulevard.

Although I had no formal training on how to engage with a patient suffering through this experience, I knew what I felt in my heart, and that was this: the nurses don't care for so-called convicts and criminals, nor does the state, and sometimes not even our loved ones. Therefore, I felt obliged to care for the men who represented a potential future I might experience if I failed to fight for my freedom. As a result, I extended my fight for freedom, and my mission became to get Mr. B out of prison.

The old-timer would often tell me, "Dig roadie, let them people know it's time for me to go...and I'm ready!" I attributed his declaration to a desire to get out of prison, along with some delusion due to his condition. Then, on one of his better days after he returned from the bathtub, I was cleaning his cell and overheard him ask the officer to check his out date. To my surprise, I learned that his out date had come and gone.

The following week, the counselor came to the health care unit and had him sign his parole violation papers. That's right! He was MSR'd (mandatory supervised release) a couple of weeks prior, but because he didn't have any placement, he was violated. His terminal illness made it complicated to find placement, and he seemed to have no familial support.

So, my mother, brother, and I began working together, contacting nursing homes to find Mr. B a placement. The first time I put him on the phone with my mother, he said, "Dig roadie, I respect the game, so I ain't gonna do no mackin' on ya moms." I can't help but laugh at the memory. Even in that condition, he requested that I keep him with a clean-shaven head and a crisp goatee. After several failed attempts to speak with nursing homes, my mother had a breakthrough with the Salvation Army, out west on Madison. My mother pretended to be his sister, and she was told to contact them the Tuesday following Labor Day 2019.

We were racing against time because his condition was worsening each day. The Labor Day week came and went with no one at the Salvation Army taking my mother's call. Mr. B asked me each day, with great anticipation, "What's happenin', roadie? I'm ready to go." After a couple of weeks of saying, "Old-timer, I'm waitin' for them to respond," a letter came in the mail from the Salvation Army marked "Return to Sender."

Within days of me communicating to him that our attempts had failed, he died on September 17, 2019, at 3:30 p.m. I was mentally and emotionally crushed. This man died in prison because he didn't have a place to go.

The most important lesson I learned from him was to never go to someone else's home to clean up. Your presence is what is important.

On his bad days, I would sit in the cell with him, but to do so, I would freshen it up, and his response was, "Why are you f'ing with me? I don't come to yo spot cleanin' up, don't come to my spot cleanin' up. Sit yo ass down!" ■



Reclaiming health, purpose, and mindfulness behind bars.

By Michael Jorgensen

Who wants to live a longer, healthier, and more fulfilling life?

With the way I was living, you might have assumed I didn't give it a second thought. Staring down a 25-year prison sentence, I believed my life was over, and I kind of gave up. I had developed an allergy to life; it felt as if I was taking a one-way trip to hell. Life became grim, and nothing felt meaningful anymore. I only found trivial comfort in consuming overwhelming amounts of salt and sugar through chips and sweets from the commissary.

Fun fact: One honey bun is equivalent to one cigarette. I call it "death by honey bun." Subconsciously, I had this illusion that honey buns would solve my problems, but that is never the case. The instant gratification found in too many sweet treats only leads to laziness, sugar hangovers, and, ultimately, contempt for oneself. You can only eat your problems away for so long before you put your health in jeopardy. One thing's for certain — I had become fat, lazy, and lethargic.

If I had continued on that same trajectory, I probably wouldn't be here today. You wouldn't be reading this, and you wouldn't know what saved my life and what could potentially save yours.

I didn't find God, join a cult, or become a fitness nut. What I did find was intermittent fasting (IF). IF involves switching between eating and fasting, and it can be done in various ways. The most important thing is this: It's when, not what, you eat.

IF isn't some new fad, an extreme diet with a million restrictions, or a magic elixir. Those trendy diets often don't work anyway because of how restrictive they are. IF gives its user so much freedom and empowers them to take back control of their life and body. Most importantly, it's a lifestyle that has been around since the beginning of time, while we were hunters and gatherers. Back then, we didn't know where our next meal was going to come from. So, when we were out foraging and hunting, we went extended periods of time without any food — almost to the point of starvation. As a result, our bodies have evolved to rely on fasting for normal bodily functions like cellular rejuvenation (a sort of detoxification and recycling of old or dying cells) and burning excess stored fat.

Within a prison environment — notorious for its poor nutrition, harsh conditions, and lack of control — IF empowers one to take back control of their life and eat, not when the institution commands, but when one wants to.

Numerous research studies have concluded that IF is linked to weight loss, which is a marker of better health. By reducing the eating window, the body burns stored fat, leading to potential decreases in body weight, body fat, and risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. Weight loss, which is a byproduct of continued IF, has been shown to improve mood and overall well-being. Studies have also found that IF promotes verbal memory in people and working memory in animals.

While the body undergoes fasting states of more than eight but less than 24 hours (this is vital), two major things happen: ketosis and autophagy. Ketosis occurs when the body burns through glucose (blood sugar) as a fuel source and switches to fat stores for energy. Ketosis suppresses appetite and enhances mental clarity and cognitive function. Autophagy occurs when cells no longer have to grow and focus on breaking down food. Cellular rejuvenation begins because these cells stop growing and dividing and start repairing old damaged cells. Both ketosis and autophagy have been shown to contribute to a healthier aging process.

Opponents may argue that IF is too difficult because of the hunger pangs. But while the first couple of weeks of IF will cause hunger pangs, they will subside after a short period of fasting, as ketosis is also an appetite suppressant. On top of that, you can overcome the hunger pangs with coffee or water.

Also, opponents argue that IF is not healthy because it causes the body to go into starvation mode — the body shuts down energy output, and you'll stop losing weight. However, this belief is false; starvation mode occurs when the fasting cycle extends past 24 hours. At that point, the metabolism will slow down. As far as energy output goes, if you continue to eat enough protein during eating windows, you will retain the same energy output and can gain lean muscle mass.

IF is relatively inexpensive, easy, and effective for promoting overall health. You don't have to purchase fancy equipment, expensive supplements, or change religions. When I began my journey through the justice system, so much hardship caused me to want to give up. Essentially, I did, because the opportunities are almost nonexistent, and I was being treated as less than human. I found temporary comfort in overeating.

Once I conquered *when* I ate, I started to make better selections on *what* to eat. Incorporating adequate nutrition while intermittent fasting maximizes the potential for losing weight and becoming the best version of yourself physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Today, I try to stay away from anything high in salt, sugar, preservatives, and all fried foods. I still have a honey bun or bear claw on occasion, but not on a regular basis. I now only purchase nutritious foods on commissary: fish (sardines and salmon — the most beneficial), rice, peanut butter (a high-protein option), oatmeal (a slow-digesting complex carbohydrate that helps one feel fuller for longer), nuts (a source of healthy fat, protein, and fiber), and health shakes (enriched with protein and essential vitamins). All the other options should come with a warning label, but unfortunately don't.

If you are hesitant, or think IF may be too demanding, or don't have the funds for commissary, start by adjusting only your eating windows. Sixteen hours is the optimal fasting period for IF, and I try to fast for at least five days a week. After you start seeing results, you can incorporate a better nutrition plan. This is how I began my journey with IF, and over time I adjusted what I ate, not just when. This approach has proven to be exponentially more effective than IF alone. I have lost more than 60 pounds in the last few years, am emotionally and cognitively in a much better place than ever before, and feel physically in my prime. I can thank intermittent fasting for giving me the tools to find purpose and regain control of my life.

The risks are nonexistent and the benefits astronomical, so the question is not “*Will* you give it a shot?” but “*When* will you give it a shot?” ▀

WILL THE SUFFERING EVER END?

Only federal intervention and accountability can bring about the changes necessary to address systemic health care failures in Illinois prisons.

By Jamal Jones (Cincere Knowledge)

What would you do if hospital staff ignored you or turned you away simply because you lived in a low-income or underserved neighborhood? What if you were forced to meet with nurses multiple times for serious pain before being allowed to see a doctor? And what if, after finally seeing a doctor, you were given nothing more than ibuprofen?

For most people, the answer would be simple: go to another hospital. But for many incarcerated individuals in Illinois, there is no “other hospital.”

For those of us in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), the standard of care is not just inadequate — it is a direct threat to our survival.

Six years ago, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois ordered IDOC to improve its health care system after finding significant issues in the care provided to people in custody. But years later, little has changed. Despite court orders, IDOC has failed to implement meaningful improvements. This neglect has led to untold suffering — delays in diagnosis, inadequate screening, and prolonged waits for treatment.

I know this because I’ve lived it. For more than a decade, I repeatedly sought help for abnormal fatigue and extreme fluctuations in my body temperature. My pleas were met with dismissiveness from both doctors and nurses. They brushed off my concerns, contributing to years of unnecessary suffering.

It wasn’t until a nurse practitioner finally listened that I received proper care. She diagnosed me with a severe vitamin B12 deficiency, which, if left untreated, could have been fatal. If she hadn’t paid attention, I might not be here today. But not everyone has been as fortunate as I have.

Michael Broadway was a fellow NPEP student and a cancer survivor. But like many of us, Broadway didn’t battle just his illness — he battled a health care system designed to ignore us.

“For over two years, I complained about a throbbing pain around my prostate,” Broadway once told me. “The doctors would tell me to just drink more water. Then they would move on to someone else.”

He was made to feel invisible — less than human.

Finally, after years of pleading, Broadway was allowed to see an outside doctor. Only then did he learn the truth: he had Stage 4 prostate cancer. The very area he had been complaining about for years was under attack, and the prison doctors had ignored him all along.

While Broadway was grateful to be alive, many others haven’t been so lucky.

Over the course of six years, 540 people have died while in IDOC custody. Is inadequate health care to blame for some of these deaths? The situation is even worse for those suffering from mental illnesses. The IDOC system doesn’t ignore just the physically ill — it also neglects those in mental distress. Multiple suicides have occurred as a result of professionals failing to properly assess or treat people’s mental health.

A report from May 2022 revealed that 37% of individuals in state and federal prisons suffer from some form of mental illness. Chronic illnesses are also more common in prison than in the general U.S. population.

IDOC officials often point to staffing shortages as the reason for these issues. More than 50% of doctors’ positions remain vacant, and more than 40% of nurses’ and medical staff positions are unfilled. While these shortages are real, they cannot justify the continued suffering. They cannot justify the countless deaths that have taken place under IDOC’s watch.

Michael Broadway’s story didn’t end with his cancer diagnosis. Despite surviving cancer, he faced another battle — one he wouldn’t win. In June 2024, Michael Broadway passed away from an asthma attack. The extreme heat, inhumane living conditions, and neglect by correctional and medical staff contributed to his death.

The reality is this: the only way to end this suffering is for the federal court to impose harsher penalties on IDOC and demand that they partner with health care providers who can meet the real needs of those incarcerated. ■

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THE LADY BEHIND THE LENS: MONIKA WNUK

*In conversation with Monika Wnuk,
the volunteer NPEP photographer
capturing life on the inside.*

By Tony Triplett

On November 15, 2023, Monika Wnuk and several media photographers gathered to attend a historic Northwestern graduation: 16 men received their bachelor's degrees, the first time in U.S. history that a top 10 university would confer such degrees on incarcerated students.

With a camera around her neck and several lenses in tow, Monika zigzagged between students, their families, and other guests who filled the theater at Stateville Correctional Center. However, Monika wasn't with one of the media outlets such as ABC, CBS, and Reuters that were there that day; she was taking photographs for NPEP.

Despite sharing the same profession as those around her, she had an advantage over every photographer present. Before this day, Monika had been to Stateville well more than 10 times; this was her third graduation in the same exact building.

While the media was there to tell a story about that day, Monika — who knew us individually and knew our academic journeys that brought us to this day — was on a different mission. “I’m not just documenting their day,” she said, referring to us. “I’m documenting a moment in their life.”

“To see those original NPEP students, who paved the way, in their purple gowns was such a proud moment,” Wnuk continued. “I also loved seeing the outpouring of love and support from the faculty and families and taking so many family photos that day.”



Before that momentous day, our journey with Monika started eight years ago. She visited Stateville for the first time in 2018 as part of the Northwestern Office of Global Marketing and Communications, where she worked as a multimedia producer, writing and photographing stories about Northwestern's faculty and students.

On her first trip to Stateville, she arrived in the education building wearing a Medill-branded fleece sweatshirt and blue jeans. I instantly assumed she was a journalist.

Most volunteers who come to Stateville for the first time are nervous and timid. However, Monika was the total opposite. I still remember her firm handshake and welcoming smile when she introduced herself. Her smile put us at ease.

Within the first five minutes of watching her work, I realized she wasn't the average photographer. While most photographers made their presence known, she was the total opposite. She was stealthy; she could capture authentic moments without inserting herself into them. If it weren't for the click of her camera, you wouldn't even know she was there.

“For me, photography is a very social art form,” Monika said. “You get to paint with light and compose and capture scenes, but you also get to help tell the stories of your subjects. To do that, you get to connect with them, learn a lot about them, and, through earning their trust, gain access to intimate moments in their lives.”



Monika (front left) and the NPEP class at Logan Correctional Center.

Monika's interest in photography has family ties. She grew up around photographers, including her uncle, a former photojournalist who worked in communist Poland in the 1970s. "Seeing his collection of photos from that time felt like peering into a time capsule of what daily life was like back then," Wnuk said. "I have always loved taking pictures, but it wasn't until I was at Medill learning about photojournalism that I realized it was something I could do as a career."

Since graduating, Monika has spent the last decade learning photography "on the job," shooting for nonprofits, universities, families, and NPEP. She's worked at Northwestern University's Institute of Sustainability and Energy and the Office of Global Communications and Marketing. Since 2020, she's worked with AARP as an associate state director of marketing and communications.

If you ask any incarcerated resident what one of their most prized possessions is, they'll probably say their "pictures" — images frozen in time, a social résumé of who they used to be before their incarceration.

Unfortunately, all the images of us were of the past. We dwell on current photos of loved ones that allow us to embrace the present, see their journey from the inside, and visualize the important moments in their lives. But our loved ones did not have current photos of us.

Monika Wnuk has allowed students in the NPEP community an opportunity to be seen through a different lens. Whether it's a graduation, gown fitting, or just a regular day in class, she allows us to share our NPEP experience with the ones we love. They're able to accompany us on our journey.

At the same time, she makes our place within our families visible. "When I get to shoot [students] with their families, I'm documenting a piece of their family history and making sure that the students are able to be a part of it," she said.

Before my enrollment in NPEP, my mother had one picture of me. It was a picture of me on Mother's Day. I was about 80 pounds lighter with a head full of hair (for those of you who don't know, I'm bald). For the first 11 years of my incarceration, my mom would stare at that picture endlessly while the tears escaped her eyes. My mom calls it a memorable moment.

Fast-forward to the present day, and she has a photo album of my academic journey in NPEP that she shows off to her friends and family. None of that would have ever been possible without Monika Wnuk.

On behalf of the entire NPEP community, Monika, thank you for allowing us to share and showcase our academic journey with the ones we love. ▀

IN CONVERSATION WITH ...

RACHEL VENTURA

ILLINOIS STATE SENATOR,
43RD DISTRICT

Lynn Green — an NPEP graduate and one of the first incarcerated legislative interns in Illinois history — interviewed the state senator on her efforts to uplift the incarcerated.



Courtesy of State Senator Rachel Ventura

In a cramped, musky chapel room at Stateville Correctional Center, a maximum-security prison, the DePaul Law & Policy Think Tank members stand behind red plastic seats to greet Senator Robert Peters and his guest, Rachel Ventura. It is a Thursday in the summer of 2022, a few months before the November election, and Ventura is running to capture the state senate seat for the 43rd District in Joliet, Illinois.

The DePaul Law & Policy Think Tank is the product of DePaul University's Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. In the think tank, students engage in critical thinking, challenging existing social policies, designing new policies, or improving policies that contribute to solving poverty, mass incarceration, and other social inequalities.

After introducing everyone in the room, our host, Dr. Christina Rivers, opens the floor. This is not Senator Peters' first time visiting our Think Tank, so he gives a breakdown of what he would like to accomplish legislatively and a brief overview of things that are taking place surrounding the elections. Then he smiles, knowing what's coming next: the barrage of questions from Think Tank members. And he's right — the questions flow.

Soon, many questions are directed to Ventura. What are your beliefs and values? If you are

elected, what kind of senator will you be?

Then, a question is asked that captures everyone's attention: If elected, will you consider us, the incarcerated, to be your constituents?

Without hesitation, she responded, "Yes." Will you return to our Think Tank to speak with us on your own and work with us on policy? "Yes."

Then, one of the members, Eric Watkins, puts Ventura squarely on the spot with a question that might create difficulty for a political figure: If elected, will you consider having an incarcerated individual as your intern? Ventura pauses briefly before she breaks out in a giant smile. "Absolutely," she said.

In November 2022, Ventura won the state senate seat for the 43rd District, and true to her word, she came back to Stateville to visit with the Think Tank.

Shortly after her visit, she began the process of hiring an incarcerated intern to work with her office from inside the prison. I became that first intern and worked with Ventura on juvenile justice reform, specifically the research behind two juvenile justice bills that she proposed to the Illinois State Senate ([SB2361](#) and [SB3090](#)).

I recently sent Ventura a series of questions about her efforts within and outside of Stateville.

Responses have been edited lightly for clarity and length.

Lynn: Why did you establish an internship for individuals incarcerated at Stateville?

Ventura: Eric Watkins (an incarcerated student at Stateville) had asked whether I would consider it. I worked with DePaul to see whether we could create a program that offered college credits. They were committed to seeing it through, so I decided to pilot an internship.

Initially, we weren't quite sure how it would work, so we set the goal of reviewing legislation and making suggestions for changes. Later, we expanded it to include interviews about how legislation impacted those incarcerated or, if these laws did not yet exist, how they would potentially impact individuals.

Lynn: Having worked with interns from other prison education programs, do you have a vision for prison education in Illinois? And what might it take to turn your vision into reality?

Ventura: I think education is crucial to rehabilitation. We currently have some requirements and mandates for education at the state level, but I would highly encourage expanded education programs at all facilities, including higher education and certification programs. Funding and commitment from the IDOC administration would be needed to ensure this is a priority.

Lastly, I have advocated for broadband to be available at all facilities, and I will continue to fight for funding to provide public high-speed broadband access to all schools, libraries, and prisons.

“Everybody in my district is my constituent, regardless of their age, ability to vote, or support for me. ... Incarcerated individuals are no exception to that duty.”

Lynn: What have been the benefits to you, as a legislator, in having an incarcerated person like me as your intern?

Ventura: The whole process has been informative and educational. Everything from learning that family members have to pay to email their loved ones to learning the process of moving paper in and out of the prison. Logistics was one of the first things we had to work out. Viewing laws through the eyes of system-impacted individuals was beneficial as I started to understand the barriers and problems created by our current system. Also, seeing the human element of personal growth in each individual was so valuable. It's difficult to put into words how it benefitted my office. It allowed me to value someone's work not by their title or past choices but by the skills and ideas they bring to the table today. That helps wash away biases and preconceived notions.

Lynn: What advice would you give your colleagues in the Illinois State Senate about starting a prison internship program in their district?

Ventura: I would encourage any legislator working on criminal justice bills to consider bringing on an intern or at least working with some educational programs to receive feedback from incarcerated individuals. There's a saying: "Make no laws about us, without us." It only makes sense to ensure their voice is at the table when considering state policy and laws. If legislators decide to offer an internship program, it would be advisable to have a point person in their office as the liaison or project manager. This person can work in tandem with the facility and warden to ensure success with logistics, communication, and, ultimately, a successful internship.

Lynn: Having pioneered legislative internships for the incarcerated, could you see yourself hiring an incarcerated individual who has re-entered society as an intern or for any other position with your office?

Ventura: Absolutely. We recently had an opening in my office, and we shared it with End Permanent Punishment and Restore Justice to share with system-impacted individuals to apply. Unfortunately, this time around, no one had applied, but my office is very open to any individual being considered.

Lynn: When you first visited the DePaul Think Tank at Stateville, you were asked by one of its members whether you would consider incarcerated individuals as your constituents, and you immediately answered “Yes.” What made you answer that question without hesitation?

Ventura: Everybody in my district is my constituent, regardless of their age, ability to vote, or support for me. It is my responsibility and duty to uphold the laws of the United States and the State of Illinois, provide government services to everyone in my district, and draft legislation that improves Illinoisans' lives. Incarcerated individuals are no exception to that duty.

Lynn: If you could change anything about legislative internships for those who are incarcerated, what would it be?

Ventura: I would have better Zoom access. I would have a liaison who works for IDOC to help facilitate this program, ensuring that information could be easily shared, and perhaps supervised internet searches. I have an internship with the [Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice], and they have a staff member who helps facilitate Zoom meetings and oversees internet searches as needed. Expanding computers in facilities is also important, not just for this program but also for the education programs. I am actively working with IDOC to make this a reality. ▀

“I would encourage any legislator working on criminal justice bills to consider bringing on an intern or at least working with some educational programs to receive feedback from incarcerated individuals. There’s a saying: ‘Make no laws about us, without us.’”

IN CONVERSATION WITH ...

MARQUIS BEY

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR
OF BLACK STUDIES

Dr. Marquis Bey's approach to teaching and scholarship through the lenses of race and gender, as told to NPEP student Joyce McGee.

I was blessed to have Dr. Marquis Bey as a professor in the spring quarter of 2023. He has an unconventional teaching method, very simple and laid back. He is a fountain of knowledge, and he facilitates the flow of ideas with ease.

I felt so expanded when I left his classroom. Dr. Bey gave real meaning to people like Langston Hughes, bell hooks, and James Baldwin. He introduced me to people like Tim Wise and Eula Biss, and the next thing I knew I was dissecting these tough texts on white supremacy and oppression, on marginalized people, sexism, and race. Dr. Bey had the entire class captivated. We talked and debated our assumptions and beliefs like true scholars.

I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Bey and get to know him a little more. We explored his journey to becoming a professor, the books and articles he has written, his love for Black history and for teaching — and more. His answers made me feel alive and eager, and they encouraged me to understand more deeply how Black life, Black queer life, and Black femme life can positively impact all lives — which is one of his goals as a professor.

On the following pages are Dr. Bey's responses, comments, and observations from our interview, edited lightly for length and clarity.



Courtesy of Dr. Marquis Bey

I was born and raised in Philly. I'm a middle child — my brother is three-and-a-half years older than me, and my sister is 12 years younger than me. I've always been the one who got good grades and liked school. But it wasn't until late high school/early college that I started loving reading. For me, reading is how I discover, how I tap into a vast history of others who have felt and thought and experienced things like and unlike me. As James Baldwin says, "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive."

In college, I majored in philosophy, American studies, and English (yes, three majors — I was very, very extra), meaning that I had to ask myself, "What the hell do I want to do with this?" I knew I wanted to write and read and think. So, I went to grad school. I did my Ph.D. in English at Cornell University, and began specializing in Black feminism, queer theory, contemporary Black literature, and critical theory (this is just the cool academic way of saying "philosophy").

"For me, reading is how I discover, how I tap into a vast history of others who have felt and thought and experienced things like and unlike me."

And from there, I just kept reading and writing about these things. And now I'm at Northwestern, in the Black Studies department, Gender and Sexuality Studies program, English department, and Critical Theory program (yup, four different departments — still very, very extra). I've written five books and a bunch of articles, too. The specific topic of each book shifts — from more anecdotal and personal to radical political movements to race and gender theory — but overall they all carry the theme of trying to rethink race, gender, and "racialized gender" (the ways that "gender" is never just gender but always wrapped up in perceptions of race, too). In other words, my books are about how we interrogate the systems that have imposed certain meanings and conditions onto racially and gender marginalized populations, and how can we use the radical traditions of those populations — namely Black, feminist, and queer — to imagine an alternative way of life for us all.

I also love Black history, in part because of how multifaceted it is. There is no one "Black history"; there are so many strands, so many lineages. And to me that is so exciting — I get to think alongside people who thought seriously about freedom and how to arrive at it, or people who thought about better worlds. And I get to see the ways that different people converge or diverge from one another intellectually or politically and then ask why and what conditions led to that split. I find that stuff fascinating. And more specifically, with Black history there is a unique meditation on questions of freedom and identity and belonging that I personally find incredibly rich, more rich than other fields that ask these questions.

What are my goals as a professor? Of course, I want my students to learn new things. But also, more fundamentally, my goal in all of my classes is to get students to love more deeply Black life, Black queer life, and Black femme life — to see how these ways of living can impact positively all of our lives.

I've had so many types of students — of course many, many Black students, but also privileged white students who were incredible in thinking through that privilege and, effectively, being down for the struggle; I've had non-Black students of color who saw such wonderfully generative connections with their own lives even if the readings didn't speak directly to them; I've had students, too, who didn't give a shit about the materials, or who might have even been hostile to some of the ideas. So many students. But one of the reasons why I love teaching is because I get to encounter so many different kinds of students. You all bring such interesting insights to the ideas that sometimes I didn't even think about.

My teaching methods are on the simpler side. The way I think about it, my role in the classroom is only two things: be a fountain of knowledge and facilitate the flow of ideas. That's it, really. I assign readings that promote thinking in deep ways, that promote interrogating assumptions and beliefs and understandings of the world. And I trust students to read. In the classroom, then, I want only to provide opportunities to fill gaps in understandings by sharing knowledge from the literally thousands of things I've read, and then I want to get students talking to one another.

My students sometimes think I have two personalities. On the one hand, my syllabus is strict and has a harsh tone. On the other hand, I'm quite chill, even Zen, in the classroom. I hadn't really realized this was a thing, but it makes sense.

My syllabus is pretty unwavering and particular about what I expect in the classroom. As many academics say, the syllabus is a document where professors dump their classroom traumas — in other words, this bad experience you had with a student or with a class manifests in you making a policy in your syllabus that tries to prevent that bad experience from occurring again.

“But one of the reasons why I love teaching is because I get to encounter so many different kinds of students. You all bring such interesting insights to the ideas that sometimes I didn't even think about.”

And I guess I've done something similar: I've had bad experiences with students completely misunderstanding the assignments or doing something wildly unexpected that I wasn't pleased with. So I try to make my syllabus the kind of document that prevents those things from happening.

The chillness in the classroom is just Marquis being Marquis :). I am pretty laid back by nature. I'm not very angry or loud or demanding. I want to have conversations with my students, ask deep, interesting questions. I trust my students deeply — sometimes too much! — so I'm less concerned with whether y'all actually did the reading. I already assume you all did. With that common ground, we can then have conversations about things that impact us, how the ideas from the readings might apply to our lives or might allow us to live life more courageously, fully, informed, etc. I don't want my students to feel like they have to perform in any particular way; I want you all to feel like you can just have a conversation with me. ▀

Inside of Rigidly Cogent Binary Illusions

*A reflection on the teachings
of Dr. Marquis Bey*

By Erika Ray

Inside of rigidly cogent binary illusions—
the pedagogue's configuration wages war against gender. . .

Ahhhh what insignificant absorptions we lend to
the power of misgiven labels
that allow color and sex and class to be unchecked fables

With cis-tem failure our beings are again able. . .
to reclaim living with delicate phrases

For you and me
Dear City of Brotherly Love
what a beautiful

rhythmic, boundless treat
bringing us to know ourselves without defeat—

the intersecting immure of preserving
trans and Black gifts
giving voice and beauty

to the deconstruction of myths
that we can only be the

either or
Marquis
I once was and am no more

Black or brown
woman or girl

but all things me
all things
all me

Sincerely.

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THE ‘SLAVE PATROLS’ AND MODERN-DAY POLICING

The deep-rooted lack of accountability for crimes against Black communities, as described in Dr. Joy DeGruy's Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing.

By Ramon “Ben Khayil” Montague

When I see the phrase “to serve and protect” on police cars, I know it refers to white people and their property. The police have historically valued the well-being and property of white people over that of Black people.

Reading *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* by Dr. Joy DeGruy left me thoroughly impressed. She provides a sharp and accurate assessment of the dire problems African Americans face when dealing with law enforcement. What struck me most was her historical research on policing and how, as she writes, “the similarities between the slave patrols and modern American policing are too salient to dismiss or ignore.”

DeGruy argues that slave patrols should be considered a forerunner of modern law enforcement. She cites the 1705 Virginia Slave Code, which removed criminal consequences for killing an enslaved person:

“...if any slave resists his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction, it shall not be accounted felony; but the master, owner, and every such other person so giving correction, shall be free and acquitted of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such incident had never happened.”

In her open letter “No Humans Involved,” Sylvia Wynter points to a similar mindset in modern law enforcement. She writes that the dehumanization of young, unemployed Black males has allowed them to be subjected to the “genocidal effects [of] incarceration and elimination ... by ostensibly normal, and everyday means.” The phrase *no humans involved* reflects law enforcement's attitude toward marginalized groups: Black people are seen as nonhuman. This dehumanization has paved the way for policies like qualified immunity, shielding officers from accountability and minimizing the murders they commit.

After reading DeGruy's analysis, I fully understood the connection between the Virginia Slave Code of 1705 and modern policing in America — the way police today can kill unarmed Black people and face no consequences, much as the slave patrol did in 1705.

I remember the assassinations of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, leaders of the Black Panther Party, while they were still in their beds. Hampton was lying next to his pregnant fiancée when Chicago police and the FBI fired at least 100 rounds into their apartment, killing both Hampton and Clark.

These Black men were killed by Black and white officers simply because they had the audacity to stand up for Black people. No one was held accountable for these murders — an example of state-sponsored violence, ripped straight from the Virginia Slave Code of 1705.

Fast-forward to the murder of George Floyd, who was killed by police on camera. The world watched in horror. Protests erupted, and a unified voice demanded justice. This time, the officer who murdered Floyd was tried and convicted.

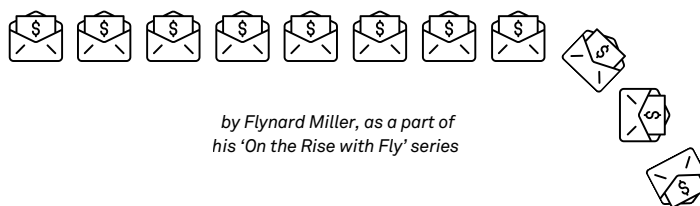
I am a 64-year-old Black man who had his first encounter with law enforcement at the age of five. I had wandered off from my friend and gotten lost. After crying and rubbing a dirt ring around my right eye, I was found by a police officer who returned me to my family. That was my only positive experience with the police — perhaps because I was a child, the officer saw me as human. But once I became an adult, that changed. Every encounter since then has been negative.

DeGruy's analysis of post-traumatic slave syndrome has made one fact abundantly clear: the slave patrols were never eradicated.

Instead, they were camouflaged and modernized. ■

PAYCHECK TO PAYCHECK

*Millions of Americans find themselves trapped
in a paycheck-to-paycheck cycle.*



*by Flynnard Miller, as a part of
his 'On the Rise with Fly' series*

In the cafeteria of a Chicago-area United States Postal Service outpost sits Nikki, a mail carrier.

Her half-hour breaks from the grind are a two-sided coin: On one side, she gets a break from her eight-and-a-half-hour shift. But on the other, time doesn't move fast enough until she can clock out.

She glances at the clock on the wall, which seems stuck in place. "Is it broken?" she wonders. Each passing minute seems slower than the rest.

"Man, won't 11:30 get here already?" she says aloud.

Like many workers living paycheck to paycheck in the United States, Nikki is tired of the 40-plus-hour workweeks. Most days, she can't wait to get home from the minute she clocks in.

According to a 2023 survey conducted by Payroll.org, 78% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck — more than three-quarters of the nation's population struggles to save money or invest in their dreams after paying down their expenses and debt. Five days of work, eight hours a day, two days off, only to repeat it again the next week.

With inflation on the rise, the cost of living has skyrocketed, making every paycheck worth less.

Soaring gas prices, food in the local grocery aisles, and everyday household products cost more and more — it's no wonder many Americans now live paycheck to paycheck.

This has created a form of financial slavery, where people work a full-time job and spend every penny of their paycheck, unable to save money or buy things that are enjoyable to them. And it's taking a toll not just on our checkbooks but also on our health and well-being.

Janice, a 60-year-old home care worker from Chicago (and also my mother-in-law), suffers from anxiety about managing her finances and not making enough to make a difference. Once she gets her paycheck, "she doesn't see it," she says — the money is gone as soon as it comes in, to bills, debts, and basic living costs. Janice believes that in order to get by in today's world, every household needs to have two incomes.

Even those who aren't living paycheck to paycheck are dealing with the fallout of financial slavery.

More people are calling off work, taking advantage of paid sick leave, and using vacation time to relieve some of the pressures and stress of having to slave to pay the bills.

Ethan Watters, who wrote the book *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche*, highlights that financial instability can lead to a range of mental health issues, from constant worrying and sleeplessness to more severe symptoms like rapid heartbeat and difficulty breathing. These findings are consistent with broader research indicating that economic worries significantly impact mental health, contributing to anxiety, depression, and other stress-related conditions.

The stress of worrying about financial stability is detrimental to our nation's well-being. We shouldn't have to work tirelessly to make ends meet, trapped in a perpetual cycle of effort and exhaustion.

While critics argue that overconsumption, poor financial planning, and a lack of financial literacy

are reasons people live paycheck to paycheck, this perspective overlooks systemic issues.

Many individuals face stagnant wages, high living costs, and limited access to affordable essentials like health care and education. What is often labeled as overconsumption includes these necessary expenses, which, as I mentioned, have risen significantly.

Furthermore, the lack of financial stability is compounded by broader economic inequality and insufficient social safety nets, which play a more significant role in perpetuating financial insecurity than individual spending habits alone.

We can't fix some of these larger systems blocking us from achieving financial freedom, but there is hope for Nikki, Janice, and the three-quarters of Americans living paycheck to paycheck. Below are some ways that friends and families of incarcerated individuals can cope better and overcome financial slavery. ■

- **Create a Budget:** Track your income and expenses to identify where to cut costs. MyMoney.gov offers resources on budgeting, saving, and managing debt.
- **Build an Emergency Fund:** Start small by saving a portion of each paycheck to create a safety net for unexpected expenses. America Saves, managed by the nonprofit Consumer Federation of America, offers strategies for households to create an emergency fund.
- **Reduce Debt:** To reduce overall financial strain, focus on paying down high-interest debts first. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers advice on reducing debt and avoiding scams.
- **Increase Income:** Look for side gigs, freelance work, or additional shifts to boost your earnings. CareerOneStop, from the U.S. Department of Labor, provides information on increasing income through job training, educational programs, and more.
- **Automate Savings:** Set up automatic transfers to your savings account to ensure consistent savings. Most banks can do this, and strategies vary depending on your financial situation.
- **Seek Financial Advice:** Consult with a financial advisor to develop a personalized plan for financial stability. The National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC) offers free or low-cost financial advice.

FORGIVENESS & GRACE

The paths to healing, accountability, and transformation.

By William Peoples

In most spiritual practices, forgiveness and grace are attributes that are extolled as virtuous acts. In the Abrahamic faiths of Christianity and Islam, believers are encouraged to forgive and show grace to others even as they hope for God's forgiveness and forbearance for their faults and transgressions.

However, theory and practice are two separate things; and this is especially true when we come from a society that inculcates the idea of retribution, punishment, and revenge into us in our earliest stages of human development. From cartoons to fairy tales, we are taught to expect and exact retributions for behavior that is deemed wrong, evil, or sinful. As children, we are scolded and punished for our wrongdoing and disobedience. In our social and educational institutions, we are taught the lesson that wrongdoing and disobedience must be paid for with pain, suffering, and humiliation.

This message is hammered home in the books we read, the movies we are entertained by, the music we listen to, and finally, our judicial system. In fact, the ideology of retribution is so dominant that even in the criminal subculture of gangs and prison communities, it is practiced with fervor and glee.

So, while we pay lip service to these virtues and while most of us plead with judges, prosecutors, governors, and the general public to show a modicum of forgiveness and grace to us for our crimes, we do not practice what we profess to believe. Some seem to think that to forgive or show grace means that we tolerate or turn a blind eye to all manner of evil and harmful behavior. For me, grace is meant not as absolution for wrongdoing but as a "grace period" wherein one is afforded understanding and withholding of judgment and condemnation and accountability, even as they do the internal work of striving to amend their behavior, with the ultimate goal of doing and being better. Grace then, in my view, is not exemption; it is respite, allowing time for transformation and reform.

I take a like view of forgiveness. When I say "forgive," I do not mean to say overlook, tolerate, or pretend that a wrong did not occur.

To be forgiven, there have to be conditions, and the act of forgiving is, to me, far more beneficial for the one who has been wronged than it is for the wrongdoer. When harm is done and that pain is internalized, it can develop into a cancerous manifestation of hatred, resentment, and recurring thoughts of revenge. So, in this sense, forgiving is part of the arduous process of healing from trauma and harm for the victim.

As it relates to those who cause harm, forgiveness is an essential component of atonement. Forgiveness is not a "free pass" or "get out of jail free" card. In bestowing the gift of forgiveness, the victims are not saying "you are excused" or "you did nothing wrong"; the point of forgiveness is to offer the wrongdoer a viable path back to a "right relationship" with themselves, the aggrieved party, the community, and all sentient beings. I use the word "bestow" because, contrary to popular belief, forgiveness is not earned; it is given, and then the beneficiary of it is expected to live up to the value of that blessing and work to become better. The price of forgiveness is the expectation that the wrongdoer will strive to (a) not repeat the offense, and (b) be proactive in the endeavor to repair, reconcile, and recompense the victim. Forgiveness does not forgo accountability or responsibility for wrongdoing; if anything, I would argue that it inspires those who cause harm to live in ways that merit the priceless gift of forgiveness.

Being the recipient of forgiveness necessitates paying it forward when we are wronged. I firmly believe that love, compassion, patience, mercy, and forbearance are capable of achieving what retribution, punishment, and revenge cannot! And that is, the full and complete reconstitution of families and communities after breaches have occurred. Just for a moment, dream a little dream with me, and imagine a world where wrongs and offenses are not met with a desire for our "pound of flesh" but instead with practices rooted in love; where even as we hold one another accountable, we work to heal, restore, redeem, and reaffirm the humanity of those harmed, as well as those causing harm. If we can dream it, we can deem it a reality! ■

Inside the Classroom

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Inside The Classroom: Op-Eds Through Their Eyes

When I first met these featured contributors and their fellow classmates in November of 2023 — just two months before I started the op-ed writing course — it was immediately clear that they had a lot to say. The pieces written by Todd Mandoline, Michael Jorgensen, James Hale, Ian Valencia, Yaphet Davis, and Paul Forbes reflect the brilliance that exists within the prison walls, both within NPEP and across the country.

Over the course of several weeks, I had the privilege of observing these men produce insightful op-eds that illuminated the diverse and often untold stories within the carceral system. As their instructor, I also encouraged them to write pieces that extended beyond the boundaries of the maximum-security prison, granting them the freedom to delve into issues that mattered most to them and their classmates.

The contributors featured here tackled the harsh realities of medical neglect within the prison system, shedding light on the daunting challenges incarcerated individuals face in accessing essential health care. They explored the tough decisions that the incarcerated must navigate, including the seldom-discussed choice of opting for Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders amid an environment fraught with pain and neglect.

Beyond addressing the health care disparities, these essayists focused on other pressing issues. For instance, one contributor eloquently described the profound psychological effects of solitary confinement, shining a spotlight on its enduring impact on mental health and overall well-being. Another writer passionately confronted the pervasive issue of mass incarceration among youth — particularly among Black, Latino, and other marginalized individuals. He offered an in-depth analysis on the societal consequences, and fervently argued in favor of compassionate reforms.

Furthermore, our writers did not hold back from assessing the ongoing injustices within the American legal system and the dubious methods of policing in urban areas, providing a critical analysis of its impact on communities and drawing attention to the systemic issues. Through their collective voices, they amplified the voices of those too often silenced or ignored, fostering a crucial dialogue about the intricate realities of incarceration and justice in our contemporary society.

Readers are invited to engage with these thought-provoking perspectives that challenge and inspire us to envision a more just and humane society. ■



*By Michael Deas,
assistant professor at the Medill School
of Journalism*

MOMMY,



HELP!

The ongoing harrowing experiences with medical neglect while incarcerated.

By Todd Mandoline

If no one else cares, my mother will.

Throughout my incarceration, I have witnessed utter disregard for humanity when it comes to medical concerns pertaining to individuals in custody. My own experience has been no different.

In October 2022, I woke up around 4 a.m. with nausea, cold sweats, and the inability to regulate my body temperature. These symptoms caused me to vomit repeatedly for the next five days.

The symptoms subsided. The heat had yet to be turned on in my living unit in October. Coupled with a draft inside my cell, I figured the sickness was simply a seasonal virus that worked its way out of my system.

How I wish that were the case.

Three months later, the symptoms returned for nine agonizing days, preventing me from eating, sleeping, or performing simple everyday activities to keep up my hygiene.

I was told to rest, stay hydrated, and stick to a clear liquid diet. However, this did little to ease my fear and anxiety of this health issue taking hold of my body. My emotions ranged from fear and anger to utter hopelessness and defeat.

Over time, the symptoms would unexpectedly return for an unknown duration, bringing my entire life to a standstill. It's as if my body hated me and was attempting to torture me to the fullest extent before giving out.

Well, hurry up and get it over with then.

After several months of pain, I was notified by an anonymous insider of the Stateville health care unit that my name had been circulating regarding my health issues. "Oh, his MOMMY called to complain," someone had said with a healthy disdain. The causes of my pain and suffering had left me to desperately plead to the only person who could bring me relief: my mom.

Imagine if it was your son, brother, father, or husband who was in prison experiencing physical pain or discomfort. How would you hope the on-site medical professionals responded to their medical issues?

Certainly not to mock or discredit them because “mommy” was forced to call as a last-ditch effort.

The seeming disregard and lack of a diagnosis — coupled with a lack of humanity and care for others — were not unique at Stateville. After injuring my left knee in 2016, I wasn’t sent to an outside hospital until 2022. There, an MRI confirmed a partial tear of my meniscus. My next-door neighbor consistently bled from his rectum since April 2023 and a year later had not been sent out or diagnosed.

How about Johnny, a 42-year-old type 1 diabetic who has been on dialysis for six years now? On the evening of Jan. 25, 2024, he began to experience pain in his left bicep, where his port was implemented for his three weekly dialysis treatments, preventing him from moving his arm past a 90-degree angle.

He alerted a medical technician and asked what to do. She told him that it was most likely a blood clot, but he would have to wait until the next morning to tell the nurses at dialysis. They would have to be the ones who sent him to the outside hospital.

On the morning of Jan. 26, 2024, he was sent to an outside hospital where an emergency surgery was performed. Due to the alarming number of blood clots, the surgery that should have taken one hour instead lasted for five. If he had waited any longer, the surgeon told him, it was highly likely he would have died.

This is not to say that the health care professionals in Stateville didn’t care about individuals in custody. Most times, their hands were simply tied for lack of resources. The backlog of patients needing to be seen is great. In addition to people who are truly ill, the list includes people who believe they have a life-threatening illness but actually have a simple cold or flu, as well as people seeking attention and lying about their health in

“[But imagine] if it was your son, brother, father, or husband who was in prison experiencing physical pain or discomfort. How would you hope the on-site medical professionals responded to their medical issues?”

order to get out to see a specialist such as a gastrointestinal doctor. The backlog of patients throughout the health care system isn’t just confined to those who are incarcerated; there are fewer providers available to treat everyone efficiently.

But lack of resources is not an excuse. Treat us with dignity, without dismissing our humanity. Act as if it were your loved ones going through trauma. If we adhered to the Golden Rule — treat others the way you want to be treated — then many of these issues could be remedied. Though we have been convicted of crimes, we are still human beings and should be treated as such.

This starts with the nurses and doctors employed by the State of Illinois. Our lives are literally in your hands. ■

This piece was written in early 2024, prior to the passing of Janice Mandoline, Todd’s mother. A tribute to Janice can be found on page 113.



LIFE, DEATH, AND A DNR

What it means to sign a DNR from inside.

By Michael Jorgensen

When Death comes knocking on life's door, will you give in, tap out, and let Death take you? Or, will you fight for life by keeping that door closed?

For many who are incarcerated, there doesn't seem to be a whole lot to look forward to. Life inside consists of pain and suffering, day in and day out. From insufficient food and undrinkable water to lack of contact with the outside world and the lowest allotments of health care, the quality of life is below acceptable levels for a developing nation, let alone America.

Is this blind injustice, or have we, as a nation, become content and complacent about the inhumane treatment of our incarcerated citizens? As an inmate, I can attest that I am not content and that the inhumanity behind these walls must cease. But I retain hope for a better tomorrow. I cherish life and the preservation of it.

Even if these horrible conditions got worse, I could never give up and relinquish my right to live through a do-not-resuscitate order (DNR). A DNR is an advance directive that prevents medical personnel from attempting to revive a patient through any lifesaving techniques or procedures, now or in the future.

While I may regard life as precious no matter what, I also have an out date. For other inmates, however, a life sentence is a death sentence. So is a DNR a way to speed up the process? To me, it seems like this is a silent surrender from life and the possibility of a future before resuscitation is needed. Are people who opt into a DNR throwing in the proverbial towel?

Four guys I interact with daily admitted to me that they willingly placed a DNR on their file. Each of them has a de facto life sentence. To understand further, I interviewed my cellmate, Anthony Ehlers, who agreed to tell me about his decision to sign a DNR 20 years ago.

Ehlers, a recent bachelor's graduate from NPEP, has been incarcerated for 32 years for a murder-robbery charge. He was initially sentenced to death and spent nine years on Death Row before his sentence was commuted to life without parole in 2001.

I assumed that Ehlers's choice for a DNR was based on hopelessness and his life sentence, especially after Ehlers said that he would remove his DNR if he got out of prison within the next couple of years.

I wanted to know more about how he came to this decision, which is almost always reserved for people with fatal medical issues and for those who are entering hospice for end-of-life care. But Ehlers told me he's healthy, has no physical medical concerns, and is only 52. Why doesn't he want to be brought back to life?

"It's about the quality of life and living conditions," Ehlers said. "[It's not about] giving up." Ehlers tells me, "I've worked in health care [at Stateville] and interacted with hospice patients on a regular basis, seeing how no one helps, the unsanitary sights and smells, the lack of hygiene, cockroaches crawling over blind guys." Ehlers tells me he couldn't live like that if he came back from a severe medical event and couldn't care for himself because no one would help him. Health care in prison is understaffed, underfunded, and overstressed.

Coming back to this place in any form is a nonstarter for Ehlers, and he is not alone. Many individuals who have life sentences also have a DNR on file.

"At times, the mental pain and physical anguish can seem insurmountable, so I understand why some of these men don't want to be brought back to such a horrible place where a less-than-humane life awaits them."

Some might question the link between DNRs and life sentences. Because of medical privacy laws, I couldn't obtain the actual number of individuals inside prison who have DNRs. But, in my limited six years in maximum facility prisons, I have struggled to locate people with life sentences who *haven't* submitted a DNR form.

With a lack of access to proper health care, poor living conditions, minimal nutritional requirements, and undrinkable water (Stateville has found high levels of lead, copper, and *Legionella*), you might assume we live in a developing country. But this is how America treats and further punishes its citizens.

At times, the mental pain and physical anguish can seem insurmountable, so I understand why some of these men don't want to be brought back to such a horrible place where a less-than-humane life awaits them. My stance on preserving life hasn't changed, but I understand where those like Anthony Ehlers come from. Their decision isn't necessarily linked to hopelessness but instead to overall quality of life.

Conditions need to change because, if nothing else, we are human beings, and this is not how we should treat each other. Change can begin with providing basic necessities such as drinkable water free from deadly bacteria and toxic metals, proper nutrition in the chow halls (or the capability of purchasing it through the commissary), and mandatory health care that prioritizes the level of care we receive behind bars.

Will America wake up? Or will She remain complacent as many more opt for a DNR as opposed to seeing this life inside prison through? ■

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

A cycle of isolation, trauma, and unseen consequences.

By James Hale

Imagine living in a space the size of a bathroom.

In reality, the space in solitary confinement isn't too much larger: six by nine feet. Inside, there's a toilet with a sink attached, a bunk bed, one steel stool, and a steel desk. You are in this space 23 hours a day with limited human contact. Your food and mail come through a dusty hole in the door.

The summers are brutally hot, and the winters bitterly cold. The only light comes through a dusty perforated window and a steel door with three bars and a perforated screen. You are allowed out of your cell for an hour a day, handcuffed and shackled. To shower, you must be locked in a cage.

This environment does not support mental health. Inmates set their cells on fire, self-harm, and throw blood and feces. Assault is rampant.

This is where I spent six months, housed in the abnormal behavior observation unit (A.B.O.) at the Cook County Jail. I was confined there because, during a random shakedown, knives were found in a wall in my cell. The knives were never proven to be mine (and weren't mine).

Solitary confinement is also used for "investigation status," which is nothing more than a revenge tactic the administration uses against inmates they deem a threat. While under this status, an inmate can be segregated for up to 30 days without a ticket for alleged gang activity or inappropriate relationships with staff or volunteers. Most of the time, the reasons behind solitary confinement are proven to be baseless — forcing inmates to spend 30 days in segregation for nothing. Once you're done serving time, though, the baseless accusations may not leave you; these actions could be used to justify long-term solitary confinement in the future.

We still don't know the effects of solitary confinement on those who experience it. Jeff Tietz, an investigative journalist, notes the paradox of tracking its effects. "Effects of solitary confinement may not become fully apparent until inmates reenter society," Tietz writes. "[H]owever, prison personnel do not monitor the long-term mental health of former inmates; in a 1999 study, the Justice Department cautioned that virtually no information exists on the effects of long-term solitary confinement."

In some instances, solitary confinement may be necessary for a certain time — for example for inmates who are an escape risk or reoffend for offenses such as staff or inmate assault. However, no one should be segregated for years of their incarceration and then be released from isolation straight to society.

"Solitary confinement exacts its toll even on prisoners who start off healthy," Tietz writes. He cites the work of one researcher who studied the effects of solitary confinement, noting that even individuals with more stable personalities and stronger cognitive functioning will still "experience some degree of stupor, difficulties thinking and concentrating, obsessional thinking, agitation, irritability and difficulty tolerating external stimuli."

My ordeal doesn't compare to that of Brian Nelson, who was sent to Tamms Correctional Center for unclear reasons. (Tamms, Illinois's last supermaximum security prison, closed in 2013.)

Nelson spent 12 years in solitary confinement and was the first person ever released from Tamms. Two years after his release, Nelson became a paralegal at a prison rights firm, Uptown People's Law Center.

However, after reentering society, Nelson continued to reenact his confinement by locking himself in his basement, in the dark and away from others. Some days, he couldn't go to work, or he worked at night when things were quieter.

"The only light comes through a dusty perforated window and a steel door with three bars and a perforated screen. You are allowed out of your cell for an hour a day, handcuffed and shackled. To shower, you must be locked in a cage."

After seeing 11 psychiatrists, Nelson was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Solitary confinement followed him home, and in 2021, Nelson died in his Uptown People's Law Center office while reading letters from incarcerated individuals.

"No one escapes solitary confinement unscathed," writes researcher and psychiatrist Terry Kupers. "Everyone who is in a supermax has some kind of psychological damage as a result."

The abolishment of long-term solitary confinement is the only way to fix and end this trauma. Why not instead provide access to programs, such as anger management or mental health treatment? Why can't we teach current and former inmates their triggers along with coping skills? Why can't we provide access to mental health personnel with regular psych evaluations to monitor inmates in prison and after inmates reenter society? Why can't we, as a society, do better? ■

BLACK, BROWN, AND STATE BLUES

The mass incarceration of youth.

By Ian Valencia

It was May 8, 2000, when, for the first time, I felt the cold steel of police handcuffs close around my little wrists. I was eight years old, and though I had witnessed plenty of incidents involving overzealous police and other members of my community, it was traumatic to experience it myself. I was much too young to understand that being poor and Native relegated me to being "at risk" or even a criminal by default in the eyes of many.

Whether the officer's intention was to scare me or punish me in some way, the simple fact is that actions such as his often cause trauma for children, in addition to the issues that come with growing up in an impoverished environment.

According to the Prison Policy Initiative, 68% of people in state prisons were 18 or younger at the time of their first arrest; I ended up in prison at the age of 17. According to Richard Mendel of The Sentencing Project, youth who become involved in the justice system are seven times more likely than other youth to suffer traumatic experiences.

This research finds that trauma can impede children's healthy brain development, harm their ability to exercise their cognitive and volitional functions, and heighten risks of delinquent behavior.

Although police violence is often a big topic in America, the type of violence perpetrated against inner-city youth — due to the rollback of needed government welfare policies and racial targeting in particular — often goes underreported. To minimize or ignore such physical and psychological violence and the effects they have on the development of the youth is to ignore the state of communities suffering from what seems to be an unbroken cycle of random acts of violence, drug abuse, and poverty.

One inmate, a 46-year-old Black man who has been incarcerated for 24 years, told me he was homeless by the age of 13 and that when police caught him sleeping in an abandoned building, instead of being shown care and compassion, he was beaten and taken to jail for trespassing.

Once released, he was still alone and had no source of help or support to turn to — especially the people sworn to serve and protect — and so he continued living in abandoned buildings and crack houses. By age 16, he had smoked crack and had developed substance abuse issues. By age 22, he was serving 32 years for an armed robbery murder for which, he maintains, he was falsely convicted.

In a time when punitive crime measures have drastically increased alongside tough-on-crime rhetoric, it has been Black, Latino, and Native American youth who have been disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration and social stigmas. According to studies conducted by sociologist Victor M. Rios, 95% of all juveniles sent to adult court are minorities.

John J. Dilulio, director of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives for President George W. Bush, and William Bennett, former secretary of education under Ronald Reagan, helped influence expansive punitive juvenile justice reform throughout the U.S. by claiming that poor, urban youth were an "emerging violent and criminal risk to society" and it was crucial to "deter" and "incapacitate" them at the earliest age possible.

"There is very little that we can do to alter life experiences that make some boys criminally 'at risk' ... let the government Leviathan lock them up, and when prudence dictates, throw away the key," Dilulio said.

With rhetoric that labels youth as hopeless and as risks to society, what are the youth themselves supposed to believe they can achieve or expect? With little to no programmatic or financial resources to provide youth support for positive development and with politicians calling for punitive policies that treat juveniles as adults for their mistakes, more Black, Latino, and Native American youth are being corralled into the criminal justice system without receiving the help necessary to develop hopes and dreams that reach further than the labels placed upon them.



Politicians, police, and other advocates of being tough on crime say that kids like myself and many similarly situated youth made our choices, and harsh sentences are necessary for the benefit of society.

However, when statistics and studies show that Black, Latino, and Native American youth are disproportionately targeted as criminals and are 8.3 times more likely to be tried as adults than white youth — and that the majority of arrests are made in struggling and destitute communities — it should lead you to question whose society is benefitting from the mass incarceration of young, and often poor, minorities.

Today, after almost 15 years of incarceration, when I look around, it's not just the familiar set of state blue clothing I see on each individual in here that stands out — it's the overwhelming number of Black and Brown faces that seem common to the uniform. What is just as common are our stories of being minorities in poor neighborhoods and our shared experiences of growing up in prison in the age of mass incarceration. ▀

The Legal System's Role in



Perpetuating Disparities

The law as a gate: protecting elites, blocking others.

By Yaphet Davis

A close look at the criminal legal system reveals that many laws are created to target vulnerable and marginalized people while protecting the elite.

In other words, maintain the status quo.

On February 16, 2024, Judge Arthur Engoron ruled that President Donald Trump and his organization "deceived lenders, insurers and tax authorities by inflating the value of his properties using misleading appraisals." The judge ordered Trump and his adult sons to pay a penalty of \$355 million for their transgressions.

While this may appear to be a harsh penalty, the average U.S. citizen is imprisoned for less egregious white-collar offenses.

In the book *Just Mercy*, Bryan Stevenson contends that a disturbing legislative trend has resulted in the increased incarceration of vulnerable groups such as women of color. Stevenson recounts the story of the first woman he met in prison. She tells him of how she is serving time for writing bad checks to buy her kids Christmas presents.

Stevenson writes: "I couldn't accept the truth of what she was saying until I checked her file and discovered that she had, in fact, been convicted and sentenced to over ten years in prison for writing five checks, including three to Toys 'R' Us. None of the checks was for more than \$150. She was not the only one. Thousands of women have been sentenced to lengthy terms in prison for writing bad checks or for minor property crimes that trigger mandatory minimum sentences."

The intricate web of our legal system is threaded with discernible biases. With a scrutinizing eye, one can readily see that the laws of our country are designed to subtly reinforce existing social disparities while safeguarding the elite.

Imagine society as a towering mountain whose peak represents the elite 1% who control most wealth and power. Near the summit sits a gate stretching out from the sides of the mountain.

For those at the mountain's base, the gate acts as a barrier, preventing upward mobility and access to the elite status enjoyed by the 1%. Conversely, for those at the top, the gate functions as a safety net, ensuring they are protected from falling too far down the social ladder.

This gate symbolizes the legal system, which actively reinforces the position of the elite minority by perpetuating societal inequalities. Biased policing, prosecutorial disparities, and discriminatory laws and regulations all serve to maintain the status quo, deepening existing social divides.

Conversely, legal loopholes for corporate entities and lenient consequences for a range of white-collar crimes ensure that the privileged are protected.

In the spirit of trickle-down economics, some might contend that protecting the 1% is necessary to sustain our thriving economy. In fact, in reference to the tremendously lucrative variation of fraud that Trump committed, elitist Kevin O'Leary (aka Mr. Wonderful from *Shark Tank*) called it a victimless crime. Outraged, O'Leary stated that every real estate developer "ever" would be guilty of this.

Even though the belief that Trump's business

"Near the summit sits a gate stretching out from the sides of the mountain. For those at the mountain's base, the gate acts as a barrier, preventing upward mobility and access to the elite status enjoyed by the 1%."

tactic is a victimless crime is an admission that it is a crime, elitists such as O'Leary express shock and awe that one of their members has been penalized for what they deem to be normal behavior.

But is it a victimless crime? When the elite are allowed to defraud our banks and other financial institutions, as Trump has done for decades, there are fewer resources for those of us who need them most. We are the victims.

A critical examination of the laws that disproportionately impact marginalized groups reveals a design to perpetuate and reinforce existing power dynamics.

We must confront the systemic disparities that safeguard the privileged class to move toward a more equitable society. I'm not a proponent of the carceral system, but I do believe that the framework of our legal system should work to benefit all citizens equally, regardless of financial or social status. ▀

HOW ARE WE TO JUDGE POLICING IN URBAN COMMUNITIES?

Bad policing erodes trust and safety in marginalized communities — it's time to refocus on building relationships and community support

By Paul Forbes

Relationships build respect and trust, while fear breeds hate and mistrust.

I'll never forget my first experience with bad policing. It was the summer of 2004. A few friends and I were walking to basketball practice when an unmarked detective car stopped us and officers got out with their guns drawn. After a quick search, we were let go, never knowing why we were stopped. This is a common practice in poverty-stricken communities where citizens' rights are violated on a daily basis.

I question the methods of policing and ask myself: Is this taught in the training academy, or is this the officer's own will? Are they protecting and serving, or is this bad policing?

Laquan McDonald was shot 16 times while walking away from police with a pocketknife in his hand. My nephew, 16 years old, has shared stories about how fearful his police encounters have been, and I listen and compare his experiences to mine growing up. Nothing has changed since I was his age 20 years ago.

As an individual in custody, I watch the news and wonder how safe my daughter, my nephews, my nieces, and other children are, growing up in these communities.

Some may say the method of policing in poverty-stricken communities is justified due to shootings, carjackings, and armed robberies. However, boys and girls shouldn't have to suffer illegal search and seizure because of the actions of another.

Bad policing does not help our communities. It helps the carceral systems with arrest and imprisonment. About 5 million individuals cycle through local jails every year. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, Black people are incarcerated at 600 per 100,000 people versus white people at 184 per 100,000. The cost of policing is \$63.2 billion, and the costs paid by incarcerated people and their families (for things like phone calls) are \$2.9 billion.

It would take only a portion of the money spent on policing to fund programs and community centers in marginalized communities.

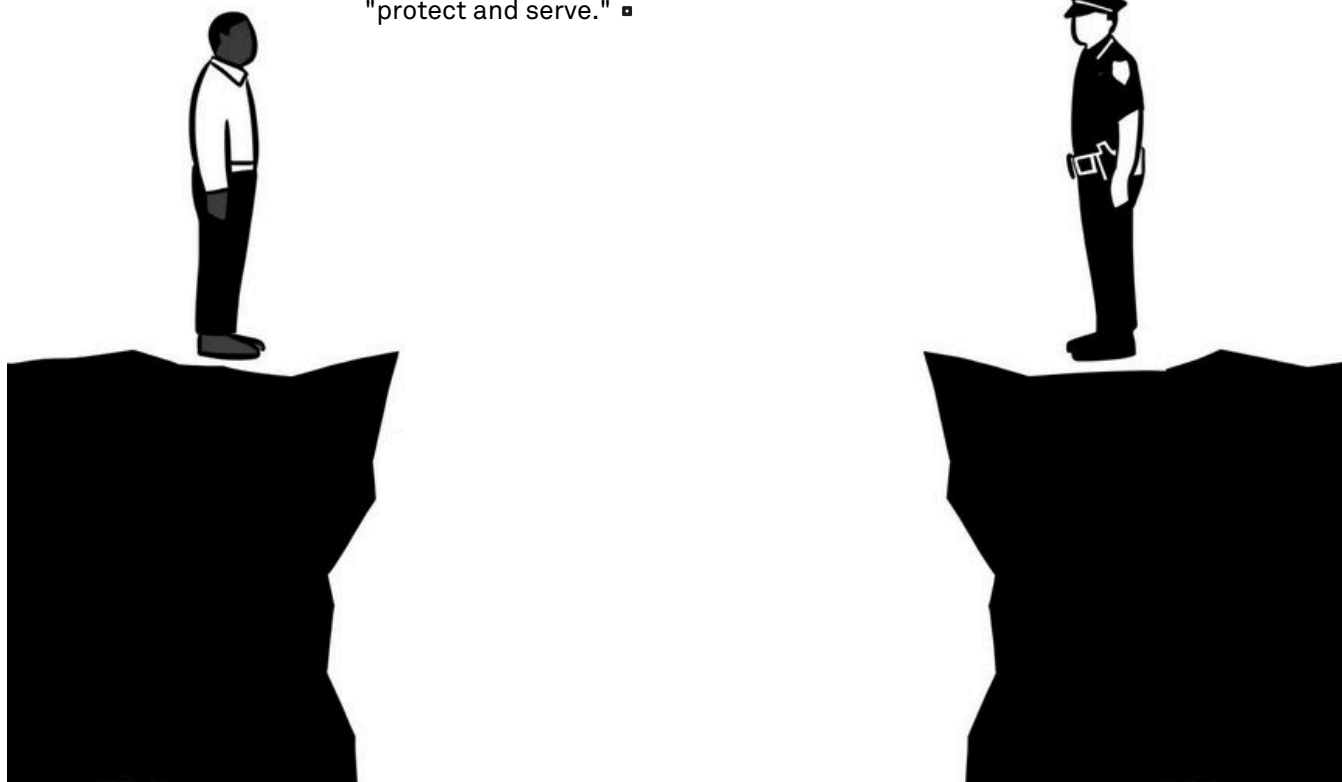
If the officers assigned to these poverty-stricken communities grew up in similar circumstances, they would understand the culture of the community. If officers built relationships with the people in the communities in which they are assigned, they would receive more cooperation from the people. The people would not frown on police encounters and policing.

We understand how crime affects our communities because we grew up in them, live in them, and raise children in them. We want to be able to call the police when we need to, but we don't want negative effects to follow.

We are not against the police. Rather, we are against bad policing. With so many officers in the news for violent incidents, such as police shootings, having an encounter with an officer is a frightening experience. We want our children to be able to play outside, walk to school, walk to practice and to parks without their rights being violated by an illegal search and seizure. We want to be able to trust that when we call the police, they are not going to come with the intent to shoot someone but with the intent to solve a problem.

Bad policing decimates the opportunity to build relationships and community ties. It instills fear and discontent, and it costs taxpayers unnecessary money. It is not protecting the community; it's a disservice to communities.

We only ask that police live up to their slogan of "protect and serve." ▀



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A Decade of Pain

By Miguelangel Garcia

Young souls dreaming.
Together for a summer.
Getting to know each other,
Young Love.
Lovely friendship developed through
The beautiful aromas of the flowers.
Summer!
Butterflies gliding over the grass's dew,
Sun shining bright.

Dark clouds appear,
Raining misery.
Young man incarcerated,
Lion caged.
Forgotten by his love,
Forgotten by his friend.
He went into a rage,
Pain consumed him.
A decade apart,
Weighing heavy on the man's heart.
Body in chains,
New memories detained.



His past sustains his sanity,
Reliving his summer love.
His love became a dream.
A decade of dreaming,
Beautiful green eyes,
Perfect body,
Sweet kisses.
Old memories imprinted in his brain,
Every detail of his summer of love.

To tell the grief of memory,
Sadness in his loneliness,
Cold in silent darkness.
Steel bars watching,
Harbinger of gloom.
Old love a light shining,
Illuminating his smile,
Bringing color to the broken man's life,
A friend needed
To piece together his heart.
Powerful friendship
That nothing can sever.
Friends stronger together.

What You Made Me

By Anthony Ehlers

The grinding of the days goes by,
Like heavy gears,
You can feel it in your bones.
This, among other things,
Darker things,
You can try to ignore
With the childish hope
That if I don't look directly
Into the darkness
It doesn't exist.
My heroes are ghosts.
But me?
They haven't found a way to kill me yet.
I put the gun to my head
But I had no bullets.

My whole fucking life
Needs a mental health day!
There is a diagnosis and a drug
For everyone.
Just watch the commercials
On the 5 o'clock news.
They'll sell you any drug you want,
And "If you cannot afford this medication,
We may be able to help."
How nice of them:
The pusher man moved from the corner
To a two minute commercial
Offering to help me buy his shit
Just to get me on it.
Don't let them bury me



I'm not dead yet,
Just out of space and time,
Out of frame, and out of mind.
I'm like a dog in a cage.
If I'm a good boy, I get to go for a walk,
I can even put the leash on myself.
Programmed,
Institutionalized,
Didn't I used to shine?
Now I'm dull, faded
A seer of visions.
I'm still a spark that can catch fire,
It's just that
They took my fire on a shakedown,
And I never got it back.

I've been building up for so long
My explosion just might obliterate me.
My mental health doctor said
I used to think more.
"Think more?"
Fuck, my mind never shuts off.
It's an illness the State gave me
After 5 1/2 years of isolation.
It's not a color, but a condition,
Not a solid,
But a stripe.
How do I keep it together?
Is that what this is?
If I walk out of this place
And make a mistake, just remember,
I am what you made me.

Naked

By D.C. Crite

Healing was messy
My once hampered heart,
longing to be free of
sadness and pain,
was clothed in
fancy garments
that hid my scars and
some still gaping, festering,
pus-filled wounds —
remnants of
harm from others,
harm done by me
to others.

Before I could heal
and let go of
what ailed me,
I needed to bare all,
strip off
the shirt of shame,
peel off pants
held up by self-pity,
buttoned up by pain.



I removed every layer
that hid
the inner turmoil,
all the way down to and
including the ugly underwear of uneasiness
that came with re-awakening
childhood ghosts, a bogeyman
nobody wants to face.

I took it all off
so that I could
reclaim my power,
heal myself,
love myself,
know myself.
There I stood
in the mirror of my mind,
emotionally, in the flesh,
fully exposed,
completely vulnerable,
crying out for the world to see.

I had to become naked
to heal.

Pressure Valve

By Bryan Dean

Like a kettle whistling
Steam shooting into the air
The release of that sensation ...
Ahhhhhhhh



They say it creates diamonds.
I've never seen that,
But I've witnessed a busted pipe or two.

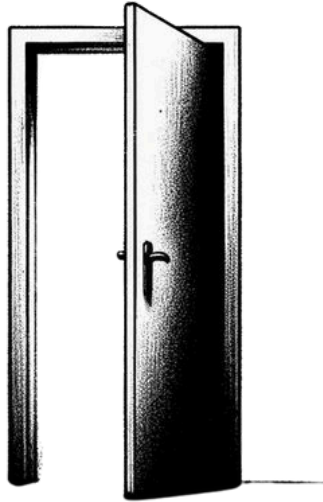
Yet ...
I ain't worried about being broken anymore.
I can breathe
I can breathe
I can breathe.

Shackles

By Chelsea Raker

as I go through the motions
my mind wanders
to movement

it wasn't something I paid much
attention to until I ...
didn't
have it



mobility
motility
autonomy
mother. fucking. legs — that work.

every night I sleep and dream of being
with people I know in the city that I
called home and
I begin to notice
black trucks,
people looking,
lurking.

I want to put as much distance
between me and my people
as I can
...they're no longer safe with me.

I collapse
begin to drag myself
army crawl—anything
but let them take me.

I blink back to reality.
There are
2 male escorts + 1 female = 3 cops in total

every pair of eyes
in the building

looks up
to stare

as they escort
all 5'6" 115 lbs
of
me
back to cell block J.

chains reverberate
with every step that
I
take

the soundtrack to my solitude:
I'm "innocent until proven guilty."

they forgot.

one officer sticks an electronic key into a slot in
the wall — the door
whines and groans
as if they dare to disturb
the tomb
it conceals

lest some poor soul escape
captivity.

with a final growl
the door slowly rolls open.

.
an officer refuses to meet my eyes
as he removes the cuffs from
my wrists.

temporarily resigned to my discontent
I walk into the block
waiting

To hear the door
slide and lock
into place
behind me
like a seamless sealing of my

F

A

T

E.

it doesn't.

I can feel their eyeballs
poking
Prodding. Imploring.
dissecting me
lasering in
like triple beams on the back of my neck.

I turn.
“What?” I snap.
they’re looking at me like I’m some goddamn experiment,
like they’re observing the supremely fucked in its natural fucking
habitat.

One officer gestures toward me stepping forward, stammering
“Uhm...do you...would you like me to, uh, I —
Let me take those off for you.”

I look down
at the shackles
that still hold my ankles.
I had walked back into my cage

Still bound
in chains like
they were part of me.

“Mirrors”

By Elbonie Burnside

Author’s note: At a young age, I remember my mother whisking me and my siblings from our small apartment on the lower South Side of Chicago. Her reason for moving her family to the North Side of Chicago to live with family was that my father was addicted to drugs and no longer considered his family a priority.

The separation from my father left our family vulnerable to people who intentionally took advantage of small children and a struggling single parent. At the age of 10, I lost my father due to a car accident, which caused a lot of pain to all of his children. Even through hurt, pain, and anger, I blamed my mother for his early departure from this realm of life.

As a single parent, my mother turned to family at times for help. That help was given through places to stay as well as financial support. It wasn't long after my father's passing that I experienced molestation at the hands of a close friend of the family. At age 10, it to me felt like I was being punished for something I had done, which allowed silence to invade my thoughts and cripple my courage.

Because of my silence, I had to live with knowing the very same offense committed against me was also committed against my siblings due to my muffled voice. Although I have witnessed people I love experience different levels of pain, I have also witnessed them persevere.

A reflection of a ten-year-old girl stares
at a middle-aged woman

Bruised internally

Emotional harm shadows the soul

A constant reminder of harm
harmful family, friends...
even associates keep up with trends.

A consistent removal from neighborhoods,
the living spaces that have been considered
homes will continue to write a story of her
passion, torment, and compassion,

reflecting a black girl lost
in a world and a criminal justice system
that are systemic, apathetic, resistant, and
unapologetically concerned
with violence.

The unequivocal broadness of violent behavior
illuminates the reflection of pain

A pain that is forced to be seen, yet
not dwelled upon, nor healed,

A reflection of resilience.



Illustration by Jason Gorman

Restorative Justice

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How We Heal

*How we can heal harm
through a restorative justice lens.*

By Abdul-Malik Muhammad

Welcome to the second edition of our Restorative Justice column. I am Abdul-Malik Muhammad, aka Malik. I'm an NPEP graduate and recently served as an NPEP restorative justice fellow.

In this issue, we are focusing on healing harm through a restorative justice lens that is:

- “Preventative,” in repeating a cycle of harm.
- “Redemptive,” in the way we heal.
- “Transformative,” by offering a less punitive approach that focuses on the injured individual's need for healing and the need of the individual who caused harm to make amends.
- “Restorative,” by taking responsibility for the harm and setting agreements to repair the harm to begin the healing process.

We recognize how difficult it can be to heal. Some injured individuals feel as though they have lost control of their lives, and their autonomy feels broken when they experience a wrongful act.

This is why we create a community social space where everyone, both the injured and the offender, feels as though they belong.

Our restorative justice circle is designed to create a safe space that feels open without barriers between participants. Everyone has a voice and a chance to speak once before anyone speaks twice. This is the beautiful thing about a talking piece being passed around in the circle — each participant has an opportunity to be seen, heard, and supported.

It is a great honor and privilege to present responses to this issue's prompt: “How do you heal?” ▫

Healing and Restorative Justice

by Annalise Buth

Buth is a Clinical Associate Professor of Law and Co-Director of the Center on Negotiation, Mediation, and Restorative Justice at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law. Buth also supports NPEP's restorative justice program.

Restorative justice offers a path for addressing harm and healing. At its core, restorative justice embraces a relational understanding of justice — one that recognizes the deep interconnection of our world. Healing and restorative justice flow together. Healing grows out of restorative practices focused on truth-telling, accountability, remorse, amends, and repair.

The cycle of harm and violence results in unhealed wounds. We need to heal in order to build equitable, just, and healthy communities. And when communities come together to address harm, they create opportunities for individual and collective healing. We heal in relationship rather than in isolation.

Healing is not linear. There are no clear “finish lines” in a healing journey. Instead, healing allows us to learn how to ride waves of grief, pain, and shame that ebb and flow. Healing transforms us.

We all carry the capacity to both cause and experience harm, and we all need healing.

How Do You Heal?

To be honest, I don't believe that I do heal. I have suffered so much trauma that if I try to heal from one, here comes more. So I suffer from compound trauma.

What I do is cope. Coping, I think, puts me on a pathway to heal when that time presents itself.

Now, what helps me cope is participating in programs and helping others become better versions of themselves.

Who helps me cope: Genuine people who truly have an invested interest in my well-being. They come from all areas of life. It is not many of them, but I recognize the love.

— Cincere Knowledge (Jamal Jones), Cohort 4

Meditation.

— Kevin Scott, Cohort 2

Healing begins with an honest assessment of self and situation. Then we take the productive steps necessary toward becoming whole again, whether that's taking time to meditate, study, work out, have discussions, or whatever medium we may use.

— Bryan Dean, Cohort 2

The way that I heal from past and present trauma is by taking the time to ponder those traumatic experiences. I ask myself "Why?" and "How?" all the time. Why did this happen? How can things be different? I may not always find the answers but just by engaging in such deep thought, I believe that I become empowered to make better choices and better protect myself from being hurt.

Another way in which I heal is by talking to others about trauma and healing processes. We are all unique but have gone through some of the same experiences. Group conversations can build community and it is that togetherness that has helped me to heal.

— Justin Cavazos, Cohort 1

How Do You Heal?

The process of healing has to be acknowledged as just that: a process. There are no magic words that can correct or rectify any problems or conditions. We must be willing to undergo the necessary events, and even struggles, that will be the inevitable course that allows us to be centered and balanced.

Overall, we should have a sense of yielding to what allows us to be at a measurable level of peace and serenity.

— Brandon V. Wyatt, Cohort 2

I have healed by sharing my story. Through my writing, speeches, and presentations, I have been allowed to be seen and heard. Sharing my life with others has allowed them to be more open with me, too. My healing is also based in restorative justice. In helping others, I strongly suggest writing your own clemency, especially if you are a long-term. It will be your own words; it is where you take accountability for the harm you have caused others.

— Patty Ouska, Logan

The first thought that comes to my mind is that I don't heal. I continue to carry certain trauma with me and simply do my best to be aware of it and handle it as best as I can. I've attempted to heal through tattoos, drugs, and relationships, but the best path I've found is, in general, not to extend my emotional self. It seems the more I put myself out there, the greater the potential is for me to be hurt in the first place. I am aware that this also comes with a price, but to be honest, this is where I'm currently at with my journey.

— Todd Mandoline, Cohort 2

I heal by practicing balance: mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical, through meditation, yoga, and a walk.

— Bonnie Shelesny, Logan

My process of healing is asking for forgiveness, forgiving others, and forgiving myself.

— Yaphet Davis, Cohort 4

How Do You Heal?

One of the most effective ways to begin healing for me is through self-reflection and positive reinforcement.

It's OK to stop what you're doing, be present, and/or reflect on our lives and everything that they entail.

I remind myself when it comes to healing from any trauma (or any type of harm), I believe in two powerful absolutes:

- 1. Embrace your emotions. I have a right to feel however it is I feel when harmed or offended, but ...*
- 2. Do not react or respond disrespectfully. I also do not have the right to act out, react, or offend anyone because of my emotions.*

Throughout the years, I've learned that only through the lens of empathy can we process and begin to heal in one way or another.

Empathy is like oxygen or energy, for that matter, because it's so very essential to our way of life. Without empathy, we will eventually silence ourselves and suffocate both individually and as a community.

I encourage us all to grasp the virtue of empathy; doing so will most definitely add years to our lives.

— Taurean Decatur, Cohort 1

Slowly, by living on purpose and trying to experience all of life.

— Edmond Duffin, Cohort 2

Healing is a process that works differently for everyone. This process can be harder if you factor in the harm you have caused. When I have to deal with problems, I initially “turtle up.” I go into my shell and think. When I can look at things dispassionately, I talk to some of the brothers in NPEP. Professors and tutors, who can give a sense of a problem that is shared, lessen the burden. Spending time alone helps a lot. I also know that I am not alone or done with my process of healing.

— Robert Cloutier, Cohort 1

I heal by writing about what I'm feeling.

— Miguelangel Garcia, Cohort 3

How Do You Heal?

I believe the first step to healing is wanting to be healed. We are more effective when we genuinely want change and are not coerced or forced. Second, we must accept the wrong that we've done or the wrong that was done unto us. Third, we must forgive. Many times, we're focused on forgiving others, but we must forgive ourselves. This is a task that I believe has to be taken one step at a time.

You can't do this alone. Many seek spirituality to heal, which has been very effective for me. God continues to help me read His word and pray to know that I'm a new creation and no longer my past. Some may try to tell you that your past will always be a part of you, but that's not true. Many of our behaviors are learned, and you can unlearn the bad behavior by involving yourself with positivity and walking into your newness.

Many seek out mental health treatment, which was a stigma years ago. But now, more are informed and accepting the help they need without feeling weird or worrying about others thinking they're crazy.

There are many different ways to heal, but it starts with you. Don't be afraid to seek help and speak to someone. Many times, we already have the answers ourselves; we just need to vent to someone. We end up exposing the problem and the solution. Refuse to allow your past harms to define you; your productive present and future will define you.

— Oliver Crawford, Cohort 4

I heal by staying positive and keeping my faith strong in Allah.

— Jeffery Campbell, Cohort 2

I have yet to heal due to the environment that continuously reopens my mental/emotional wounds.

— Darion Nance, Cohort 4

Using drawing to escape my pain.

— Hugo Ocon, Cohort 3

Self-reflection.

— Josh Hoeniges, Cohort 4

How Do You Heal?

I heal by forgiving and letting go. I've had to realize that the people who hurt me, or wronged me, didn't know they were going to impact me so deeply. Anger and hatred weighed me down from all my suppressed pain, but once I forgave, I was able to begin my healing journey.

Helping others heal begins with recognizing everybody has a story and not judging them on the pages we happen to stumble upon. Show mercy for people's shortcomings, understand their past, and be empathetic to their pain. Allow people to know that someone is there who cares to not only help close the scars that life produced but heal them with our love.

— Diandra Samuels, Logan

As a writer, I find cultivating ideas and expressing them very therapeutic; my pain is my muse.

— Antony "Talib" Bell, Cohort 4

I had to relearn to love the person looking back at me in the mirror: flaws, faults, and everything in between. I got back to the roots of my spiritual practice: yoga, meditation, honoring my goddess. I had to start over back at square one with simple things: saying please and thank you to myself and others, practicing the mindfulness of smiling at people, even saving the little lives of bugs (I will catch an insect and take it outside!)

Even when I screw up, I remind myself that every day is a new start. And I remind myself and others how small, simple human kindnesses go very far — being the "pebble in the pond," my energy ripples out and affects others.

— Cindy Shephard, Logan

How Do You Heal?

Praying and talking to others about life.

— Chris Douglas, Cohort 3

After losing my entire family a few years ago, I was lost and confused about life. I hurt inside because losing my mom, who I was so close to, was really hurtful. I just felt lost; my worst fears had now come to life.

However, there is a life after losing your parents. The healing process for me came when I entered the restorative justice team — that is where the healing began. I learned that I had a fear of being alone and of no one being there to help me after my parents were gone. But I found out through restorative justice that I will be all right — I just had to learn how to live for me and not for my mom. Education is what helped me take my mind off the hurt. For me, this whole educational process was a healing process. Thank God for NPEP.

— Flynard Miller, Cohort 2

For me, healing has occurred in stages and is ongoing. I have a hodgepodge of methods I employ in my healing: music, exercise, meditation, reflection, and interpersonal relationships. Key to my healing process is Islam and prayer. Rituals like salat (prayer), saum (fasting), and dua (supplication) are what anchor me and inform how I deal with the everyday struggles of life and incarceration. I find that a huge part of my healing comes from helping others in their journey toward healing. I listen, I counsel, I hug, and I try to model self-care and healthy ways of coping with trauma. I, too, am a work in progress; so I am constantly learning and expanding my knowledge of what it means to “heal,” as well as what that process looks like.

— William Peeples, Cohort 1

I heal by letting go of my past, accepting forgiveness from God, and moving forward on a positive path in my future to continue to grow.

Opening up and sharing my story has helped me heal. Being around positive, uplifting, motivating, and encouraging people has helped me heal. Being non-judgmental and giving unconditional love has helped me heal.

I help others by being there for them if they need me: a listening ear, a shoulder to lean on, advice if needed, a hug for comfort. I always have a helping hand available if I can help in any way.

— Latosha Howard, Logan

How Do You Heal?

I heal by knowing that there is an opportunity for good and growth in every situation.

— Robert Boyd, Cohort 1

I find ways to forget about the tasks ahead and focus on the present.

— Andrew, NPEP Tutor

Being in community with others; giving and receiving care.

— Joy Zhao, NPEP Tutor

According to Webster's Dictionary, to heal is (1) to make or become healthy, sound or whole, and (2) to restore to health: cure.

How important is healing? How does one heal? How can I help others heal? In order to move past stagnation, healing is vital because it allows one to not be weighed down by past hurt and trauma.

Healing for me starts by understanding the causes of the pain I have endured and the pain I have caused others. Healing involves understanding what triggers past trauma and doing all that I can to avoid those scenarios. As a practicing Muslim, I rely heavily on Allah to help me heal from past afflictions. In the Qur'an, Allah reminds mankind that "after hardship comes ease" and that "verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest." Whenever afflicted with what I believe is a hardship or trial, I remind myself that it is likely a test and that I must do all that I can to pass the test.

Helping others heal from their pain requires being an attentive listener, and offering suggestions that will help. Oftentimes, we hurt others and do not know that we have caused them pain. Helping others heal from the pain I have caused requires being accountable for my words and actions, expressing sincere remorse, and doing all that I can to not cause the pain again.

— Christopher Greathouse, Cohort 4

A SURVIVOR'S GUILT

By Donnell Green

How can someone who inherited poverty, distrust, and substance abuse — and then exchanged those circumstances for a 20-year prison sentence — suggest they're suffering from survivor's guilt? Yet, scenarios exist where traumatic events leave people neither victims nor victors. New dawns carry yesterday's baggage.

The importance of an all-inclusive, supportive outlet where people can take accountability, express remorse, and make amends beyond mere apologies can be instrumental in our transformation process — especially for men who are often unwilling to share their emotions. As we honor victims, it is important to show the humanity of those convicted of crimes to begin to repair the harm that lingers after interpersonal damage.

With that said, I'd like to show support for Tevin Louis, whose co-defendant was shot and killed by responding officers. For the last 12 years, Tevin has sought to honor his friend's memory but finds it difficult while he stands convicted of his friend's death. Recently, Tevin shared what it feels like to deal with his form of survivor's guilt. His poem can be found on the following page.



The Toll of Survivor's Guilt (by Jason Gorham)

12 YEARS OF SURVIVOR'S GUILT

By Tevin Louis

Survivor's guilt cuts deep into my heart
reflecting on the past until the moment I was caught.
I try to figure out why I feel this way,
having guilty feelings I can't seem to escape.
My homie is dead, but for what reason?
For just trying to survive and play street defense.
We didn't ask for poverty,
yet he was killed, and I was charged with armed robbery.
His life was taken, our soul forsaken,
me confined to a cell, him to a box.
Survivor's guilt is me in physical form
and him, just a thought.
One life cut short, another imprisoned.
Closing my eyes, I can't help but envision
the life we chose. It wasn't set in stone,
but yet the decisions we made took a heavy toll.
As I get older, survivor's guilt weighs heavy on my shoulders.
It plagues me, burdening me with feelings that are unforgiving.
Shackled to this guilt, I can never be free.
Survivor's guilt, maybe a part of my destiny?
As I figure it out along the way
I know my guilt is here to stay.
Like a tattoo that is engraved, I represent your name.
I wish you were alive so I could escape this endless pain.

I'll never forget seeing a stranger repeatedly bash my sister with a baseball bat as I watched from the ground where the stranger had thrown me.

I looked at my sister, and I could see her change with each blow. What started as defiance became fear, and then acceptance. There was no escape.

"One day, I'mma kill you!" I yelled.

Rushing at him a second time only to be thrown to the ground again, I vowed to myself that he would pay for his cruelty, even though my six-year-old mind had no idea how. Afterwards, I helped my sister home, but pieces of our innocence remained at the spot where she was attacked.

The first nightmare came a few days after the assault. Each time the nightmare replayed itself, I relived my sister's attacker striking her arms and legs with his baseball bat. The thud of the bat thumping against her arms and legs. Her twisting and fighting to avoid the blows. Me, being tossed to the ground when I tried to help. The dream played over and over again in my head until my dreamself grew large enough to stop the attack.

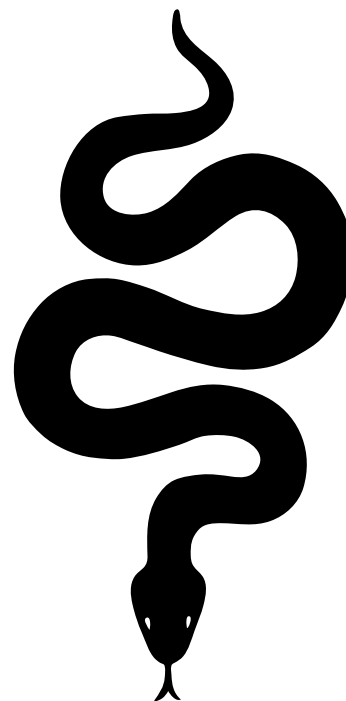
That attack on my sister hatched a venomous cobra inside me. It hissed and coiled itself tightly waiting to strike some day. That day occurred a few years later, when I was nine years old. The rage from my sister's attack — that venomous cobra — struck out, and I beat another kid so brutally that police assumed I used a weapon. They questioned me and considered taking me to the police station. Even though they did not, I didn't escape the consequences. The rage remained inside of me. Over time, the memory of my sister being attacked receded to the back of my mind. However, the rage never lost its venom.

Adding to its danger was the fact that I couldn't recognize that the rage was there. I grew up in violent neighborhoods where shootings and murder happened regularly. Living like this, I learned to see violence as little more than an unpleasant part of daily life. I became numb to the idea of violence and stopped seeing it as dangerous. And I did not see myself as dangerous until, eventually, that coiled cobra inside me led me to respond violently, in self-defense, and I ended up in prison.

FORGIVE AND FORGET — OR JUST MOVE ON?

Grappling with the complexities of forgiveness in the face of trauma and revenge.

By Mark Dixon



“Seeing myself as the aggressor brought on feelings of regret. I always thought of myself as someone who protected people from bullies, not as the one who caused problems. The realization sat on me like a weight, and my only hope of removing that weight would be to change.”

Before the attack on my sister, I remember asking my mom why people hurt each other. Not wanting to spoil my innocence, she let the question go unanswered. When my sister was attacked, I realized one answer to my question: Some people hurt others to protect themselves and the people they love. I wanted to hurt the stranger who hurt my sister.

Years later, during a life skills class, I learned an even more profound reason: “Hurt people hurt people.” This class was taught to a room full of convicted felons in prison. The message was intended to help us see that the pain we’d endured in life had caused us to hurt others. Learning that motivated me to look through the windows of my life. When I did, I got a clear look at the trauma that I experienced when my sister was attacked. I could see that the rage from that attack, growing inside me, had turned me into the aggressor starting at age nine, and I had continued to play that role.

Seeing myself as the aggressor brought on feelings of regret. I always thought of myself as someone who protected people from bullies, not as the one who caused problems. The realization sat on me like a weight, and my only hope of removing that weight would be to change. Up until that point, I had always looked at the tough parts of my journey as something to forget. Once I learned how trauma affects mental health, I knew that healing would mean looking my past in the eyes.

But was I ready to face my past?

The question loomed in my mind. I wasn’t sure if dealing with my past would bring relief, or whether it would retraumatize me. But ready or not, I chose to face it, and the first step was to ask my sister for forgiveness.

I told her about my guilt and asked her to forgive me for not being able to protect her. Tears fell onto my cheeks as we talked, and relief washed over me. Her forgiveness opened the door for me to let go of some of the guilt and forgive myself.

Then came the hard part. Could I forgive my sister’s attacker?

I knew that forgiving him would probably help me to heal faster. I knew that he was probably a victim himself, which meant I could understand his pain. I even knew forgiving him would be the right thing to do.

Yet, I still couldn’t forgive what he’d done. I didn’t even know if my sister’s attacker wanted forgiveness. Had he made positive change? Had he realized the brutality of his actions and repented? Without knowing these things, I truly couldn’t forgive him.

But what I could do was learn to let go of the rage. What the life skills class taught me was that I wasn’t required to hold onto the pain. My sister’s attack was just one moment in my journey, and in ignorance I had allowed it to follow me for years afterward to the point where my cruelty began to resemble that of my sister’s attacker. When that life skills class helped me look into my past, I got a clear look at how my past was poisoning my future. That’s when I decided, no more!

People say you have to forgive and forget in order to heal. I could not do either. But what I could do is move on and release the cobra inside of me that was poisoning me and causing so much harm. I could allow my healing to find its own path and take me to a place of release. I could watch as the snake slithered out of my life forever. ▀

Art & Illustrations

Small and Disposable
Bonnie Shelesny

90-91

NPEP x VI 2024 Exhibit

92-107

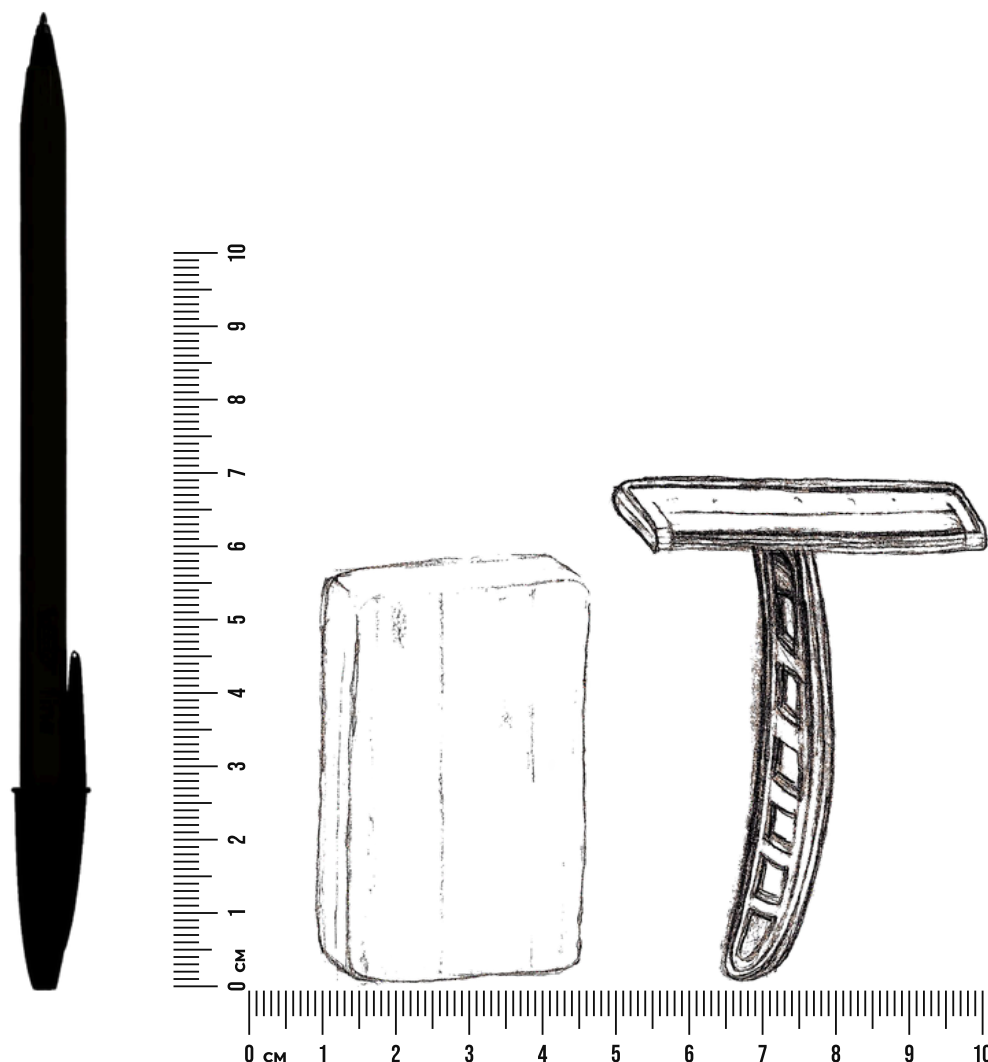
SMALL AND DISPOSABLE

Items
(from left to right):

BIC pen, for scale

State-issued soap (free)

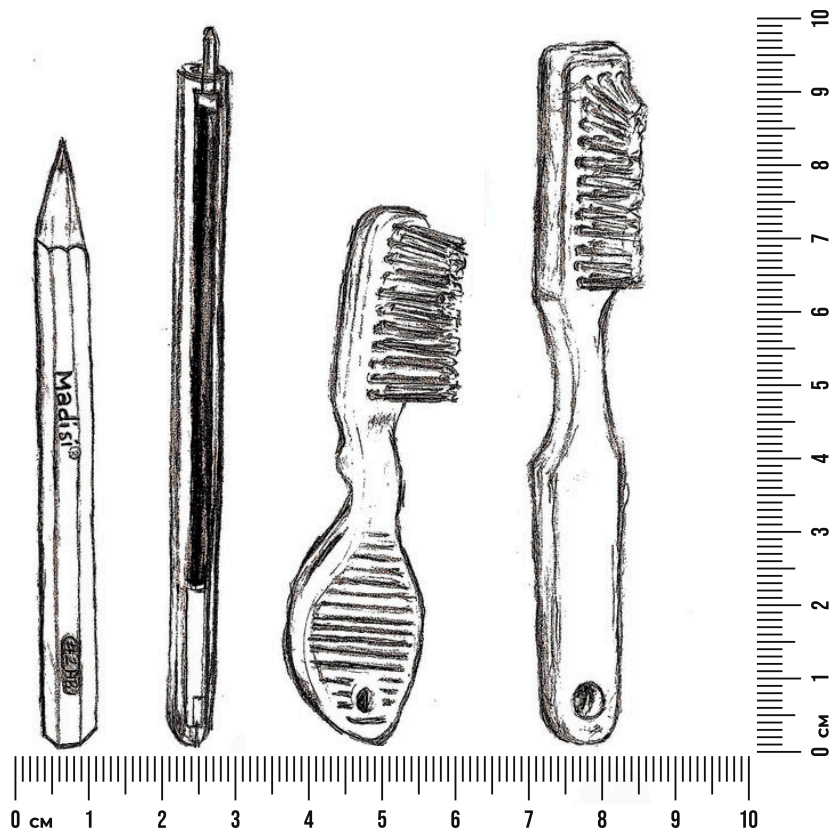
A commissary razor
(19 cents)



These are the staples of daily living that we can buy at the Logan Correctional Center commissary. We use these in the showers, at the sinks, at our desks and tables. They say the miniature size is for security. But the size also reminds us of our existence: to them, we are small and disposable.

The to-scale staples of daily living inside Logan Correctional Center.

By Bonnie Shelesny



Items (from left to right):

A golf pencil (12 cents)

A segregation pen (30 cents)

A segregation toothbrush
(14 cents)

A toothbrush (25 cents)

For the average American earning \$61,900 a year, buying a \$0.30 pen represents just 0.00048% of their income. However, for incarcerated individuals in Illinois, who make as little as \$129.50 annually, the same pen consumes 0.23% of their earnings — 478 times more than someone on the outside. Even at the higher end of prison wages, \$432 a year, the cost still represents 143 times more of their income.

NPEP X VI 2024 EXHIBIT

The Northwestern Pritzker School of Law Visibility Initiative (VI) is a student-led organization that aims to promote diversity and mental health through shared encounters with art and aesthetics. Comprising students, staff, faculty, and alumni, VI creates exhibits, workshops, and spaces for community across the NLaw campus.

The artworks of this exhibition were created by NPEP students in response to the following prompt:

“What do you want to be known about yourself, past, present, or future?”

Across several workshops, students discussed art’s power to communicate and heal. They utilized form, theme, and context to create meaning in their work. In critique circles, they worked with one another to strengthen their narratives, making changes in composition, color, and tone.

Art is an important tool for “epistemic reparations,” a term coined by Jennifer Lackey, Wayne and Elizabeth Jones Professor of Philosophy at Northwestern University, to describe the right to be known — to experience the transformative potential of telling one’s story and being heard.

As you view the exhibit in the following pages, allow yourself to encounter each student through their artwork. Bear witness to their stories. Hear and see what they want to be known.

With special thanks to the Northwestern Prison Education Program Epistemic Reparations Fund, the Bluhm Legal Clinic, the Northwestern School of Law Facilities Department, and Joss Broward.



“My Truth”

DeWayne Power Robinson

DeWayne is an outgoing, exuberant, loving, caring, generous, and grateful person. He believes in growth, education, community, and unity. He didn't believe himself to be an artist; however, he knows he possesses power that makes him unique, and he believes that his power can and will spark positive change in this world.

This piece is about EVERYONE having a perspective and having a voice that we all are entitled to. We should never allow anyone or anything to take that away from us. Most importantly we should never allow someone else to tell our stories for us. Who knows you better than you?

I know my story; however, no one else wants to see what I see. No one else wants to hear what I have to say. No one wants me to speak my mind. Although my ears and mouth have been sewn shut, I will continue to see the truth and speak the truth so my truth can be seen and heard.



“Unfulfilled Dreams”

Jamal Jones (Cincere Knowledge)

I’m not an artist, but I did want to create something to the best of my ability that depicts my thought and feelings from being incarcerated for 26 years.

The prison industrial complex does not want individuals to become better versions of themselves. I have experienced this every day since the first day of my incarceration. The system has banned books, which limits me from educating myself. The system has limited my participation not only in being a student but also in being a mentor and peer educator. As a result, I’m constantly fighting to be seen, to be accepted by society. I’m constantly fighting for an opportunity to be human.

My heart bleeds for companionship. It bleeds to be free to love, to experience love beyond incarceration. I’m crying, but I’m crying in the shadows. Prison culture does not allow for men to cry. I’m shedding tears out of one eye because there are two sides of me. The one side feels pain and hurt, the side that is lonely. The other side is the warrior, the side that is determined to liberate himself, to one day be able to fulfill his dreams.

“All Things in Color”

Erika Ray

The butterfly represents transition and new beginnings. I wanted to overlap colors with my hands as a way to show how we all — every color, race, ethnicity — connect and imprint on each other, creating pictures and stories through our kinship. Converging the butterfly with these colors through abstract art (i.e., the fingerprints and short brush strokes) makes me love the butterfly more and more.

When I think of the title “All Things in Color,” a cautionary sensation in the eyes gives energy to the heart and begs the spirit to see, explore, search for the true meaning of color, leading us always to a new beginning.





“Carceral Reflections”

Ian Valencia

Ian has been incarcerated since the age of 17. It has been 15 years. Since his initial incarceration, Ian has studied an array of philosophies and religions, written short stories and poems, and evolved into a human being far from the child who was locked away so long ago.

It is through this growth that Ian connects with the people of Gaza, the Uyghur of China, and every other oppressed or marginalized human in the world — especially those in U.S. prisons. He has learned that crime and violence aren’t innate to humanity; they are cultivated and grown through systemic oppression, poverty, and racial and class bias. The “War on Crime” is the denial of society’s responsibility to correct such inequities, and the things we often see on the news are a result of denial. Ian hopes to utilize his growth and experience in an effort to effect change by bringing awareness to those who cannot see and lending a hand to those in need.

This piece of art was inspired by the carceral system in America and the similarities to the conflict in Gaza.



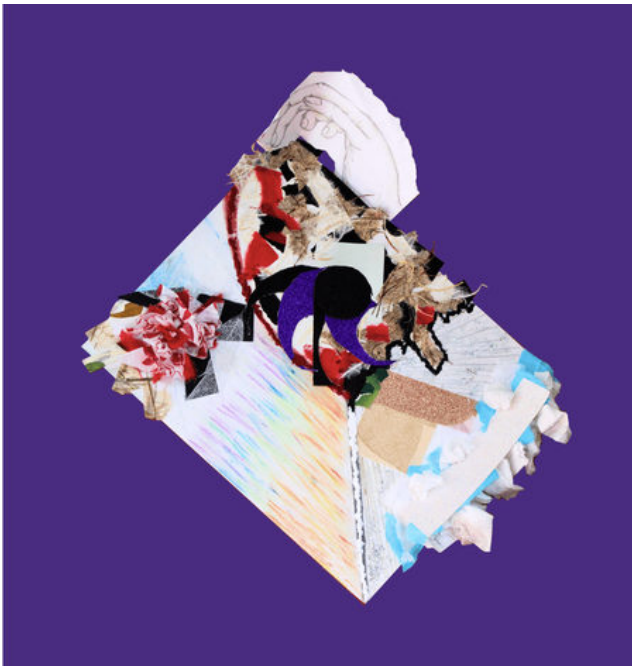
“On the Rise with Fly”

Flynard Miller

Flynard “Fly” Miller is an artist. Some of his pieces can be found on Parole Illinois. You can also find “The Long Term” animation on the Prison+Neighborhood Arts/Education Project’s website.

Fly is a Northwestern alum, Class of 2024. He has spent the last 23 years wrongfully convicted. Log on to FreeFly1.com to find out more about Fly’s case. He is searching for law students who would be willing to help him fight for his freedom.

Fly has won art contests and has had his art displayed in books such as *Carving Out Rights from Inside the Prison Industrial Complex*, published by Hat and Beard Press, as well as publications such as *Poetry* magazine. Titles of Fly’s work include “Buried,” “Boat Load,” and “Give Me Freedom or Give Me Death.” Fly also writes poetry which has been published in *Making Choices Prison Publication*. You can check out Fly’s profile on NPEP’s website and read his exciting pilot thriller, “Brandish.”

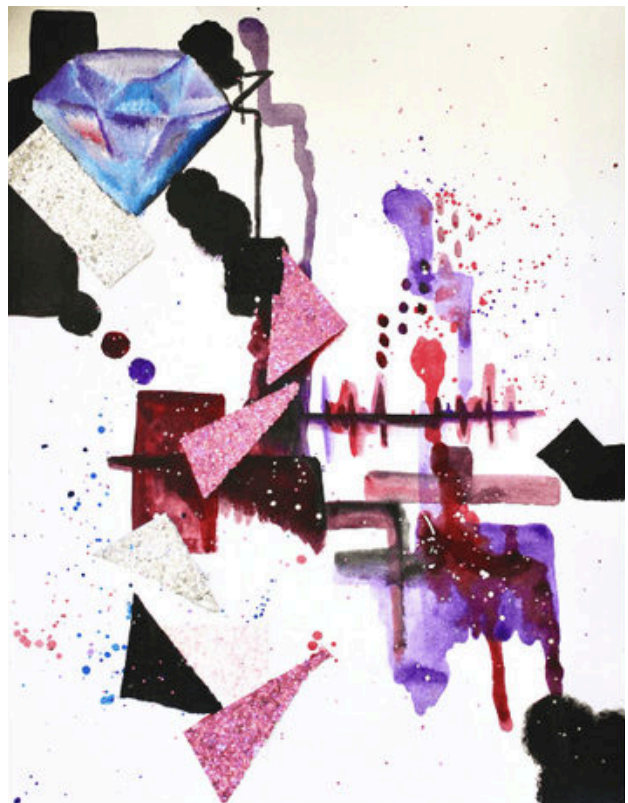


"Learning 2 Balance"
Bonnie D. Shelesny

Shelesny was created to create. And she loves to share.

Multimedia, tissue paper, pencil, and pastels were used to portray the balance I try to practice in life. The featured piece illustrates a realistic hand teetering across the cracks of broken pieces that make up some representations of my life.

"Shine Bright"
Chelsea Raker





“My Universe”

Mrs. Cindy Shephard-Robinette

This is what my universe looks like. The electric pinks, purples. The twilight of blues and blacks. While placing a subconscious pride flag. I am a proud mom of a transgender female teenager .

I am also recently married, and my husband Tony is so accepting of me, my life, my universe. He is the yin to my yang.

This is my universe.



“Domestic Violence is Learned and Begins in the Home. Child Abuse.”

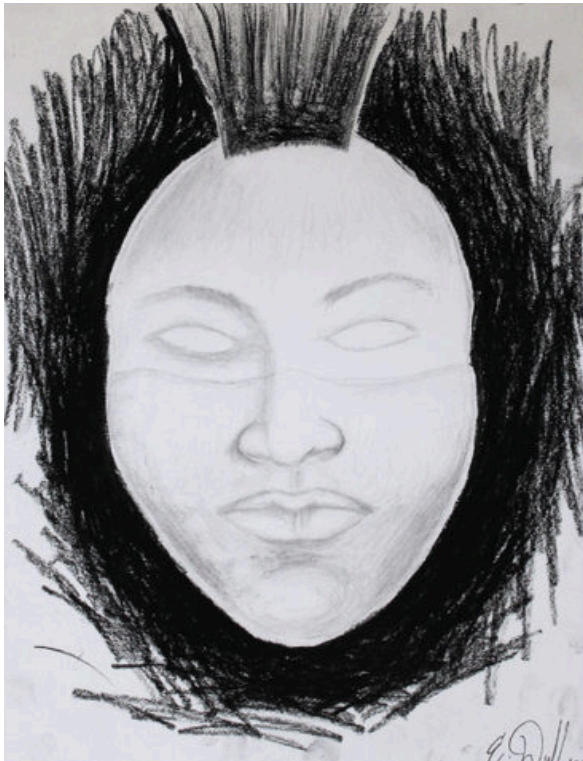
Patricia (Patty) Ouska

I have been incarcerated for 32 years. I have a natural life sentence without parole. I am a mother and grandmother of two. My daughters’ names are Alexis and Tiesha. I am Tlingit Indian. An Alaskan native. I was born in Chicago.

My two children do not understand my life or what brought me to prison. My prayer is for them to forgive me and know that I love them. This piece of art has brought me to tears. It’s healing. The materials I used are paint, glue, ribbon, glitter strips, paper cutouts from a magazine, ink pen, typewriter, and my story.

I want to lay a foundation for a new narrative, hopefully one that pushes the right buttons. By creating this piece, I am shining a light on what others need to do. I understand that this depiction seems unreal, not possible that this could happen. When I was a child I spoke about my abuse and was told I was a liar. But my story has always remained the same. It almost feels like an impossible mission. It’s not easy for me to open up and talk about something that was a traumatic experience, even to people who may be involved in some way and are protective of themselves. It can’t be a secret forever ... And the more I talk, the more it’s likely that the truth will come out.

There is still no justice.



**“Unfinished”
Edmond Duffin**

When thinking about epistemic reparations, the first thing that came to mind was the irreparable harm suffered by Native Americans first.

So my intent was to draw a crying warrior but I ran out of time, so I drew this in about 10 minutes.

Anonymous





“Student at the Bus Stop”

Miguelangel Garcia

I was born in Harvey, Illinois, and raised by immigrant parents who came to the U.S. from Mexico chasing the dream. I am currently serving a 95-year sentence. I am also a Northwestern student majoring in social sciences. I like to draw and paint and am self-taught. I prefer realism in pencil but have been learning all media.

The concept of my painting “Student at the Bus Stop” is how I see myself. I thought about being a student at Northwestern and how it felt on that first day of philosophy class with Professor Jennifer Lackey. I had that first day of school jitters, fearful and nervous but excited to learn. I tried to convey these feelings through my art.



“Signed in Blood” Demetrice “DC” Crite

Demetrice “DC” Crite is a graduate of Northwestern University planning to pursue a dual degree: Ph.D. in philosophy/JD. He believes that art is the greatest expression of mind, body, and soul. It is indicative of knowledge of self!

This work is simply a confession that is blank yet says so much because, though we may say nothing, our silence can and will be used against us!

"Me"

Rochelle Sephus

I am Rochelle. Forty-two years of age, mother of five: four handsome boys and one beautiful daughter. I have learned through my experience here at Northwestern that in spite of the labels that we wear, we can overcome and still thrive as we grow and evolve into our true destiny. Thank you for not seeing only my label but just me.



"Sunset"

Margaret DeFrancisco

One of my favorite times of the day is when the sun is setting. No matter your environment or current surroundings, you are instantly uplifted when you have a chance to catch a glimpse of the beautiful colors.



“Still Dreaming” Hugo Ocon

I was born and raised in Chicago by parents who migrated from Mexico in pursuit of the “American Dream.” I am a Northwestern undergrad student majoring in social sciences and serving a 45-year sentence. Hard work and dedication were instilled in me by my parents at a young age, and no matter what I encounter I always pursue it in that manner.

My ancestry sparks my creativity and passion for Chicano/a art. My piece represents not only my culture but what happens behind the walls of a lonely dark place. Being in prison can feel like being dead and helpless even if you are surrounded by many great people. Being enrolled in NPEP has given me a new perspective on life and on how beauty can come from the loneliest, darkest places inhabited by many productive intelligent individuals. Education will stop my time from dripping away.



“Amor”

Blanca Solis

My name is Blanca Solis. I love my children Judwilca and Jovan, and I adore my mother. I’m very passionate about education and love dogs and cats. I’m proud of both of my children. They are my life. I became interested in activism work to help the Latino population with English deficiencies to be able to get bilingual education in the prison system in Illinois. I love the color purple, and I believe in God. I’m also grateful to belong at NPEP. Love — and most importantly the love of family — is all I need to survive everything.



“A Journey from Pain”
E.L. Burnside

“A Journey from Pain” describes a traumatic event experienced at a very young age and how that led to life experiences that have contributed to the artist’s outlook on life and the world as a whole.

“My Reason to Live”
Melinda Warfel

When asked to describe herself, the artist always replies “a mother.”

This piece was done collage-style to accentuate the individuality of each of my children.

Mommy loves you, Lilly, Lane, and Logan!



Community News & Updates

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LIFE ON THE OUTSIDE

How NPEP student Brandon Perkins is navigating life after prison — while holding onto the community that helped shape him.

By Donnell Green

Brandon Perkins sits in front of his brand-new Mac laptop, dressed in casual jeans, a black Northwestern T-shirt, and warm socks. On this brisk November day, with the temperature at 30 degrees, he has taken refuge inside his home, attending his Northwestern class via Zoom — a stark contrast to being behind bars.

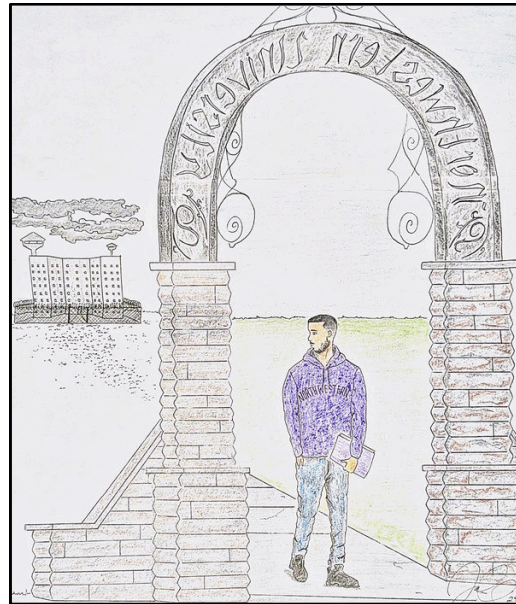
Just weeks ago, Brandon was clad in drab blue prison clothes, navigating plumbing issues and indulging in sugary snacks from the commissary while attending classes at Stateville Correctional Center, where he had been housed for several months. There, he was known for faithfully greeting his classmates with fist bumps and savoring his favorite Now & Laters before class.

Before his incarceration, Brandon made the decision while in Cook County Jail to improve his decision-making and repair some of the harm he had caused. He successfully completed various educational programs and applied to NPEP, where he was accepted.

He took classes ranging from *The Philosophy of Crime and Punishment* to *Public Speaking*. After mastering his prison routine, he challenged the circuit court for earned “good time” credits that had been withheld from him — and won. Shortly after, he was released. His classmates would no longer receive his Now & Laters, but they celebrated his victory nonetheless.

Brandon immediately received support from NPEP community members to help with his abrupt transition back into society. His newfound freedom presented endless possibilities. Among them, he was able to take part in a long-standing Northwestern tradition: the ceremonial March through the Arch, a rite of passage welcoming freshmen to campus.

Brandon is one of several NPEP students who began their educational journey while incarcerated and continued it while transitioning to life on the outside. I caught up with Brandon on Zoom during one of our class breaks to see how he was balancing his newfound freedom and coursework.



Brandon Perkins walking through the Northwestern Arch
(art by Jason Gorham)

DG: What is the first memory, the first thoughts when you came to prison?

BP: When I got locked up in county, I often thought about taking the trip to prison. It's something that lingers in your mind in the pretrial stage. To be honest, I was scared of that — this was my first time in Cook County Jail, and it would be my first time going to prison. But, when the time came, I already had six-and-a-half years in county. I wasn't scared at all; I was relieved because I knew the hard part was over and now I had an out date. I figured nothing could be worse than county, and I knew so many people from being in county for so long that I knew I was bound to run into people no matter what prison I ended up in.

DG: Talk to me about the bonds you've built within the NPEP while incarcerated, the strength of those connections, and how it's been maintaining those connections with your outside community.

BP: The first introduction to the NPEP community was when all the people in my cohort got on the bus. As the bus made its way from southern Illinois toward Stateville, the bus started filling up, and little by little we started making introductions. I knew a few people on the bus, and many other people knew each other too. Then we got to Stateville and met everyone else — the other cohorts, NPEP tutors, volunteers, and staff. Everyone was so welcoming and helpful.

The guys were offering help and tutoring, and the outside community was so kind and supportive. We have built lasting relationships, especially within our cohort — we are all pretty cool with each other. The outside NPEP community is so genuine in the way they build relationships. It's not a transactional relationship; they care and want to help.

DG: Are you allowed to speak with any of your incarcerated classmates?

BP: I'm not allowed to talk to any of the guys in NPEP who are still incarcerated outside the classroom setting. It's an unfortunate reality because I want to be able to help and be a voice for those who are still inside. Also, I feel we've built a connection, and I don't want to abandon that.

DG: Talk to me about the process of getting rid of your prison schedule, the one you had on the inside, and whether you were able to get rid of it.

BP: Getting rid of the prison schedule has been pretty tough. Even when I go out and stay out late, I wake up early the next day. I make my bed up first thing in the morning and get my hygiene together. But it has also been kind of difficult filling the time. Inside, we're always waiting on something, whether it's chow, yard, showers, phone time, or school. Out here, you're on your own time (which is great, no complaints), but it's made it hard for me to be able to adjust by being disciplined and accountable for myself.

DG: You wrote a paper about the effect prison pain had on you. Talk about some of the emotions you had seeing us on Zoom the first time.

BP: Seeing everyone in class for the first time after being released was kind of surreal. I came from a serious situation and was facing serious charges and walked away with a light sentence. So I think I felt a type of survivor's remorse — I felt like I left everyone behind. That's another reason why I would like to keep some communication open with people in there. I know what it's like when nobody answers calls, and what it's like talking to people just hearing about what's going on in the world. Another aspect of that is that I have two co-defendants, a man and a woman. They call me pretty often, and I'm trying to help them get into NPEP, too.

DG: What are some of the things you can do to avoid the triggers of survivor's guilt?

BP: The only thing I can do to avoid survivor's guilt is play my part and hope that we can make strides — creating a new narrative, opening up opportunities, and getting people home.

DG: Do you feel any pressure to achieve success on behalf of NPEP students?

BP: I do feel that there is pressure being part of NPEP. Even on campus, I feel like I have to be on my absolute best behavior because I know there are people just waiting to point a finger to say, "I told you so. Those people don't deserve this opportunity." In addition, though, I feel like we are an example — every college is looking at us right now, so if we succeed, we open the door for 2 million people who are incarcerated to get a chance at higher education behind bars.

DG: What foods did you miss the most while you were away?

BP: The food I missed the most while I was locked up was my grandma's food. Unfortunately, she passed in 2017 while I was in Cook County Jail. My mom cooks well too, but nothing beats my grandma's cooking. Besides that, what I missed are my two favorite things: tacos and pizza! I can eat that stuff every day, and I have been. That's why I gained so much weight.

DG: What is the first thing you ate when you got out?

BP: The first thing I ate when I was released was some BBQ food from this really good family-run spot by my house. Ironically, I saw a C.O. from the county there. I felt like I couldn't escape these people.

DG: I know that you're a mama's boy, is there anything you want to say to your mom?

BP: Yeah, I am a mama's boy. Haha. I just want to thank her for supporting me and going through this difficult journey with me. ■

LOOK AT ME: RAISE YOUR HAND

*Logan students take to the stage in
Women's Justice Institute
series, "Look at Me."*

By Jeanine A. Elam

On October 23, 2024, the fourth annual performance of "Look at Me" was held at Logan Correctional Center. "Look at Me" is an online series started by individuals in custody in Logan, in collaboration with the Women's Justice Institute, to raise awareness about domestic violence and its effects on mental and physical health and on our society. "Look at Me" grew out of a separate domestic violence program, "Never No More," which was filmed and made available for viewing at all IDOC facilities, with the support of Illinois first lady M.K. Pritzker.

I interviewed several NPEP students who participated in the "Look at Me" series. Here's what they had to say:

JE: Elbonie, this was your first year participating in the LAM series. What made you take part this year?

Elbonie Burnside: I was forced by my friends to step outside my comfort zone. Normally, I retreat to the background. This was an inspiring experience.

JE: Cindy, you read an original piece as well as performed in the "This is Me" dance/choir number. How did you feel performing two such totally different pieces?

Cindy Shephard: Free.

JE: Vanecha, before LAM, you were the DJ for "Never No More" in 2019. What has moved you to come from behind the shadows starting with your 2023 duet "You Say" with fellow individual in custody Breanna Travis?

Vanecha Cooper: I have always been comfortable working behind the scenes, cheering people on and giving support. I decided to participate to build my confidence. I am not comfortable being in the spotlight, so I pushed myself out of the box of my comfort zone.

JE: Margaret, how did you prepare yourself to breathe such life into your trans piece, even though you are not transgender?

Margaret DeFrancisco: To be honest, I didn't understand

the piece, but I am always in support of community, so I went all out when it came to performing my piece and memorization. Anything I can do to contribute to unity, I will do.

JE: Joyce, you've been a part of LAM from the beginning. Why do you continue to participate?

Joyce McGee: I do it to support the individuals in custody who started this program — you, Stephanie, and Erika. I admire what you do, and I will always support y'all!

JE: Stephanie, you participated in "Never No More" in 2019 and have been an active member in the LAM collective since it began. Both productions were filmed. How did they differ?

Stephanie Bonds: "Never No More" was filmed in one sitting. LAM became more of a movie production. The professionalism of the program taught us how to direct and film a movie.

JE: Latosha, this was your first year joining the LAM movement. May I ask why?

Latosha Howard: I have been silenced my entire life and decided it was time to share my story publicly.

JE: Erika, you stepped into the director's seat this year. What did you learn?

Erika Ray: I learned that boundaries are truly necessary. I also witnessed firsthand the beauty of creative expression as your work comes to life.

Through the online series "Look at Me," incarcerated people such as Blanca Solis and Bonnie Shelesny are able to step out of their physical shells and support one another, standing in their truth, releasing their hurts, finding healing, and creating family in the process. We thank all the participants of "Look at Me 2024" and we will be ready for 2025. ■

Behind the Scenes at “Look at Me: Raise Your Hand”

Photos courtesy of the Women's Justice Institute



INFO, LETTERS, & UPDATES

TO AND FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Men's NPEP Program Moves to Sheridan Correctional Center

by Donnell Green

On September 3, 2024, NPEP transferred its first incarcerated individuals to Sheridan Correctional Center to begin its Fall Quarter. The long-awaited move came on the heels of Gov. J.B. Pritzker's announcement to close Stateville Correctional Center for various foundational issues.

The transfer was a several-week process that ensured students were timely situated to begin classes. Roughly 65 individuals were transferred to Sheridan Correctional Center and were joined by a new cohort, Cohort 5, just beginning the program. All school-related materials were shipped to Sheridan to offset any inconveniences incurred from the transfer.

Before the move, Stateville had been in the news for various issues, mainly water insecurity. On June 19, Northwestern graduate Michael Broadway died of a heat-related asthma attack while awaiting transfer to Sheridan. Despite these issues, Stateville correctional officers fought to keep Stateville open, citing fears of unemployment due to the facility's closure.

Sheridan Correctional Center is located in Sheridan, Illinois, roughly 35 miles away from Stateville. Sheridan is a medium-security facility. "Moving to Sheridan is a sigh of relief and a better living quality," said Christopher Douglas of Cohort 3.

Celebrating Freedom: Lester Carroll, Paul Forbes, Paul Modrowski, and Rochelle Sephus Released

NPEP celebrates the release of four students: Lester Carroll, Paul Forbes, Paul Modrowski, and Rochelle Sephus. Their journeys from incarceration to freedom mark a profound moment of hope and transformation within our community.

Lester, Paul, Paul, and Rochelle have demonstrated remarkable dedication to education and personal growth during their time in the program, embodying resilience and the power of learning. As NPEP students, they not only pursued academic excellence but also contributed to the strength and vitality of their cohort through collaboration and mutual support.

Their release is a testament to the potential for second chances and the importance of programs that nurture intellectual and personal development. While we will miss their presence in class, we are thrilled for the opportunities that await them and remain committed to supporting their futures.

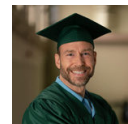
Congratulations, Lester, Paul, Paul, and Rochelle — your NPEP family stands with you!



LESTER CARROLL
COHORT 1



PAUL FORBES
COHORT 4



PAUL MODROWSKI
COHORT 2



ROCHELLE SEPHUS
LOGAN

In Memory: Janice Mandoline, an NPEP parent and community advocate

In November 2024, Janice Mandoline, the mother of NPEP student Todd Mandoline, unexpectedly passed. Todd's mother, Janice, and his father, Fred, came to almost every NPEP community hour and event, sharing their warmth, care, and love with everyone around them.

Janice's deep, unwavering love for Todd was apparent to anyone who met her. Some may remember the beautiful play Todd wrote in Rebecca Gilman's class about his mom singing "You Are My Sunshine" to him, later performed by the Goodman Theatre in April 2023.

To celebrate Janice's life, donations can be made to [Koinonia House](#), [R.T.O Ministry](#).

INFO, LETTERS, & UPDATES

TO AND FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Updates from the Illinois Legislature

by Lynn Green

For this issue, I'm providing an update on HB5396, the Corrections Medical Release Bill, and HB 3288.

On April 17, 2024, HB5396, sponsored by Representative Will Guzzardi and Senator Rachel Ventura, passed its third reading in the House and was placed on the calendar for its first reading in the Senate on April 18, 2024. By November 14, 2024, the bill had picked up four additional senate co-sponsors: Senators Javier L. Cervantes, Adriane Johnson, Lakesia Collins, and Kimberly A. Lightford.

This bill seeks to amend the Unified Code of Corrections and proposes changes to how medical release petitions are handled by the Prisoner Review Board. Key Provisions of the Bill:

1. **No Additional Restrictions:** The bill ensures that the Prisoner Review Board cannot impose extra restrictions or requirements beyond those specified by law for medical release petitions.
2. **Public Notice:** If a petitioner qualifies for medical release, the board must publicly share the petitioner's name, docket number, legal counsel, and hearing date.
3. **Record Sharing:** The Department of Corrections must provide a copy of the petitioner's evaluation and any records to the petitioner or their attorney when a hearing is scheduled.
4. **Public Hearings:** Hearings on medical release applications will be open to the public unless the petitioner requests a private hearing. Anyone can attend these hearings without restrictions.
5. **Denial Transparency:** If a medical release petition is denied, the Prisoner Review Board must publish a letter explaining the reasons for the denial, detailing the legal factors considered and the estimated costs of the petitioner's continued incarceration, including medical care.

Why It Matters: This bill is part of broader efforts to increase transparency and accountability within the Illinois Prisoner Review Board, especially regarding decisions on medical clemency. Under the current system, when an emergency medical petition is denied, no explanation is required.

For example, John Doe, an inmate at Stateville Correctional Center, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer by Northwestern Medical on February 10, 2024. He was informed he had less than 90 days to live. Despite filing for medical clemency on March 4, 2024, and meeting the qualifications, his petition was denied without an explanation. If the new law were in effect, John Doe would have been granted a public hearing and would have received a detailed explanation if denied.

A related bill, HB3288, which has passed its third reading in both the House and the Senate, is also designed to increase the professionalism and the transparency of the Prisoner Review Board. Amongst other things, the bill mandates that members of the Prisoner Review Board participate in annual training on the corrections system, rehabilitative corrections and programming, and domestic violence. It also provides that people petitioning for clemency, medical release, and parole have the opportunity to appear before the Prisoner Review Board in person or through interactive video.

NPEP Graduate Jimmy Soto Brings Lawsuit Against City of Chicago For Wrongful Incarceration

James Soto, an NPEP graduate who was exonerated in December 2023 after serving 42 years in prison for a double murder he did not commit, is suing Chicago police officers, Cook County assistant state's attorneys, the city of Chicago, and Cook County. Soto was wrongfully convicted in 1981 at the age of 20, alongside his cousin, David Ayala.

Soto graduated with his bachelor's degree from Northwestern University in 2023 at Stateville Correctional Center. Today, he works as a paralegal and hopes to use his case to send a message about the injustice of wrongful convictions.

INFO, LETTERS, & UPDATES

TO AND FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Spirituality Column — Call for Submissions

by William Peeples

My name is William ‘Shafiq’ Peeples Jr., and I’ve been afforded the incredible opportunity to create and develop a column on spirituality for the Northwestern Insider. This is a privilege, but also a responsibility, and I am here to serve, to teach, to learn, and to encourage. I am a Muslim! But I am not here to promote Islam.

My goal, my sincere hope, is that this column will cause us to reflect upon and discover our individual and inherent connection to The Creator, and one another. This is not a religious column, as religion is a specific and detailed system of belief, and ritual practice. This is about spiritual development and universal principles that are found in the natural inclinations of all sentient beings, whether they be Muslim, Jew, Christian, agnostic, or atheist. Irrespective of what we believe in, we can all agree that we desire to love and be loved, to be happy, to be safe, and to have food, shelter, clothing, and the amenities of life.

Toward that end, we might want to cultivate the best in self and others. So, my aim is not to get you to believe in Allah — my hope is to spark within each of us the desire to find a divine way of seeing ourselves and have that translate into how we move and engage with the world around us.

Please be clear, this is not my column. This is our column. As such, I am counting on interested members of the community to write also. I am the “development editor,” which means sometimes I will write the content of the column; but more often than not, I will “help” others develop their own contributions to the column.

Motivational Column — Call for Submissions

by Flynard Miller

Hello to everyone in the NPEP community and at home. I bring to you this exciting opportunity to be part of something historic.

My name is Flynard Miller. Everyone knows me as Fly, and I am currently housed at Sheridan Correctional Center. I am a writer and have completed all the requirements for my bachelor’s degree from Northwestern. Like William Peeples, I am serving in an unofficial capacity as “development editor” for a column in the Northwestern Insider. This column is focused on motivation and will feature writing that uplifts and motivates individuals impacted by the carceral system, empowering them and helping them cope and feel better about themselves.

This is a submission call-out to anyone in the NPEP community who would like to have an article published in the section of the magazine. If you would like to write something inspirational or self-helpful for our readers, please note that when you submit your piece in your story submission form.

Insider Law — Call for Submissions

by Lynn Green

Have thoughts or updates on laws and policies that impact you or your community? The Northwestern Insider is launching a legal column to spotlight insights, updates, and reflections on the law. Whether you want to discuss recent legislative changes, share how a specific law has affected you, explore broader legal topics, or something else, we want to hear your voice.

This column aims to create a space for informed discussion and awareness about the legal landscape and its influence on our lives. It’s an opportunity to educate, connect, and spark meaningful conversations within the NPEP community.

To contribute, send your submission or ideas to Lynn Green in Cohort 1, Colin Hanner, or Barbara Shwom. Let’s work together to shed light on the law and its role in shaping our world.

INFO, LETTERS, & UPDATES

TO AND FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Community News — Call for Submissions

Whether you have a court case update, academic achievement, extracurricular highlight, or personal milestone, this is your chance to share your progress and inspire others.

This section aims to celebrate the wins, big and small, of our community while fostering connection and awareness of the incredible work being done by your peers. By sharing your story, you can motivate others and contribute to a greater sense of unity within NPEP.

To submit your update, please share your news in a brief description with someone within the Northwestern Insider. Let's make this space a showcase for our collective growth and success!

Cohort 2 Raises Funds to Build Well In Memory of Michael Broadway

by Leon Fields

Professor Jennifer Baker impressed upon us the idea of leadership being tangible, practical, and empowering. During our "Principles of Leadership" course, someone stood up and said, "We always want someone to answer our prayers, but when will we be willing to answer the prayers of others?"

On Juneteenth 2024, we lost our beloved brother, Northwestern University alumnus Michael Broadway. In addition, we had been dealing with a perpetual water crisis at Stateville Correctional Center.

With this in mind, we, the students of Cohort 2, along with one of the beloved mothers of NPEP, Yolanda Fields, decided to honor Michael Broadway by raising funds to sponsor the construction of a water well in the village of Mailao in Chad, Africa. The well was constructed through the "Fountains of Hope" program, sponsored by Embrace Relief Foundation.

The well was erected and fully functioning in October 2024, and now hundreds of families living near it will remember our beloved brother while having a safe, accessible, and indispensable source of clean water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, and cultivating.



Photo courtesy of Embrace Relief

Welcome, Cohort 5!

This fall, NPEP proudly welcomed its fifth cohort of students, marking an exciting new chapter at Sheridan Correctional Center.

These students join a growing community of scholars dedicated to academic excellence and personal growth through education. Their journey represents a powerful commitment to learning, resilience, and transformation, and we look forward to celebrating their achievements in the years to come.

Congratulations on your acceptance, and best wishes for the road ahead!



Michael
Bradley



Ariel
Bueno



Orhan
Cerimagic



Patrick
Comi



Justin
Foster



Nicholas
Gacho



Juan
Garnica



Thomas
Gordon



Oscar
Gutierrez



Anthony
Harris



Darvin
Henderson



Falanzo
Hixson



Michael
Melichar



Giovanni
Rios



Stanley
Russell



Mohammad
Salahat



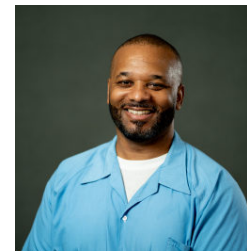
Jason
Samuels



Scott
Sanders



Dahnyah
Williams



Rommell
Winters

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NORTHWESTERN INSIDER

- Submissions are open to students currently enrolled in NPEP and to NPEP alumni. Submissions should be original and created by the submitting artist or writer.
- All genres of written work and forms of art are welcome, including but not limited to poetry, short stories, essays, and visual art. We encourage a wide range of themes and topics, including personal narratives, reflections, social issues, fiction, nonfiction, work created for and inspired by NPEP classes, reflections on NPEP classes, tutor and professor spotlights, and other forms of creative expression.

Submission Format/Process

- Fill out a story or art submission form — **please ask Barbara Shwom or Colin Hanner for a blank form.**
- Submissions can be given to tutors, NPEP staff members, or Northwestern Insider Support Staff members (Barbara Shwom or Colin Hanner). Please **DO NOT** submit your piece to professors or other members of the academic staff.

If you have any questions, please write to the “Northwestern Insider Support Staff,” or ask Colin Hanner or Barbara Shwom.

CONNECT WITH US:

Stay connected with the *Northwestern Insider* and the broader NPEP community through our online platforms. Explore more stories, updates, and opportunities to get involved:

- NPEP website: <https://sites.northwestern.edu/npep>
- *Northwestern Insider* email: northwesterninsider@northwestern.edu
- *Northwestern Insider* website: <https://northwesterninsider.com>
- Facebook: Northwestern Prison Education Program
- Instagram: @nuprisoneducation

Follow along for the latest from our students, upcoming events, and ways to support NPEP’s mission.

Acknowledgments

Heartfelt gratitude is extended to everyone who played a part in bringing this issue to life. To the writers, editors, and artists listed in the Table of Contents — your commitment to excellence through multiple rounds of revising and editing is a true reflection of the spirit of NPEP.

To the students and alumni behind the scenes who attended meetings of the magazine's Writer's Group and who organized, typed, edited, and proofread — including Patrick Comi, Christopher Greathouse, Donnell Green, Jamal Jones, Hugo Ocon, and André Patterson — your dedication and attention to detail have been nothing short of invaluable. These efforts, though unseen, have made a lasting impact on the quality and spirit of this publication.

To the many NPEP students who answered the call to respond to the Restorative Justice prompt and to provide reflections on Katrina Giles, you have made this issue a true community effort.

Equal gratitude is extended to the incredible Evanston campus student volunteers, including Joyce Wang, Ashley Maloney, Sela Breen, and other members of UPEP for their time and support. This issue stands as a testament to the collective talent, hard work, and commitment of the community. Thanks are extended to each individual and the roles played in making it a reality.

Thank you all!

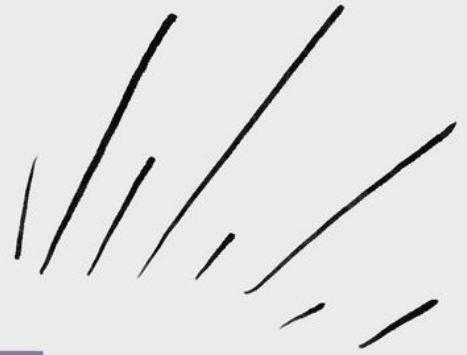
Colin Hanner & Barbara Shwom, outside team for the *Northwestern Insider*

INTRODUCING



UPEP

Undergraduate
Prison
Education
Partnership



WHO ARE WE ?

The Undergraduate Prison Education Partnership (UPEP) works closely with NPEP in Evanston. UPEP seeks to cultivate collaboration between NU undergraduates in Evanston and NPEP students in Sheridan Correctional Center and Logan Correctional Center through prison education initiatives.

WHAT DO WE DO ?

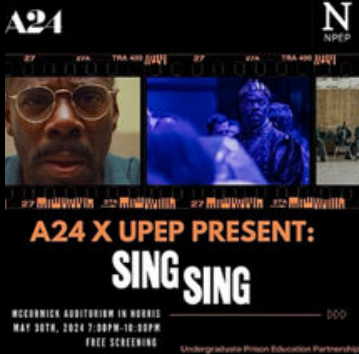
- Support NPEP's mission, "Transformation Through Education"
- Organize peer tutoring and workshops at Sheridan Correctional Center and Logan Correctional Center
- Fundraise for books and other supplies
- Engage NU undergraduates in prison education through awareness and advocacy about mass incarceration and the correctional system



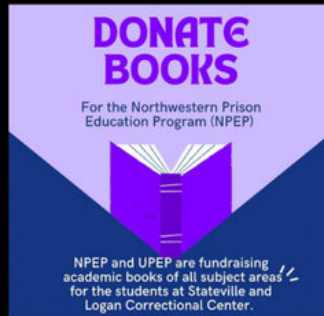
PAST EVENTS



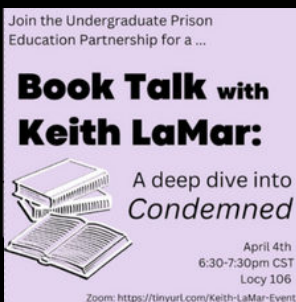
(Dis) Orientation Week



Film Screenings



Book Drives



Book Talks



Speaker Panels

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

1. Follow **@nu_upep** on Instagram and join the Listserv (request by emailing **upep@u.northwestern.edu**) for event updates and details.
2. Attend weekly open **General Meetings** in Parkes Hall.
3. Apply to join one of the following **committees** during the fall quarter: Equity and Inclusion, Events, Finance, Public Relations, Fundraising, Internal Programming, and Operations.

MEMBER TESTIMONIALS

SOPHIA CHANG, UPEP 2024-2025 CO-PRESIDENT:

Throughout my time in UPEP, I primarily worked with the Events Committee, leading and supporting educational, fundraising, and community-building events. One of the most meaningful events that I had the honor of partaking in was hosting Keith Lamar's Jazz Benefit Concert. Seeing undergraduates, professors, and community members turn out to hear Keith's spoken word and music was incredibly moving. At UPEP, students from all areas of study come together in support of the belief that education is a right for everyone. Being with UPEP students who are so passionate, committed, and caring has been wonderful, and I will miss it dearly!

MEGAN LIN, UPEP 2024-2025 CO-EVENTS CHAIR:

In high school, I saw on Instagram about NPEP and decided to apply to this school because of it. Now as a third-year student who has been involved with UPEP since my first quarter, I never regretted joining this club. Through UPEP, I was able to meet peers who were also serious about the criminal justice system. UPEP directly connected me to the work of NPEP. Last year, I started going into Stateville and it was partially through this experience that I realized I want to become an urban sociology professor. So in a way, UPEP and NPEP have shaped my past, present, and potentially my future.



Behind The Cover

*By Patricia Ouska,
the artist behind the Vol. 2, Issue 1 cover*

A dreamcatcher symbolizes love, faith, hope, fortune, and protection. It's hung close to a sleeping person. Bad dreams are caught in the web or pass through the center into the night sky. A dreamcatcher represents a small sample of my indigenous culture. I chose to paint one simply because they are beautiful, wonderful, and unique.

NPEP has allowed me to be seen, heard, and not othered.

If I were able to have one, I'd hang it close as I sleep. Right now, metaphorically speaking, I am caught in the web of the prison industrial complex. It is in my dreams where I am free of this bad dream of incarceration.



ABOUT THE NORTHWESTERN INSIDER

Founded in 2024, the *Northwestern Insider* provides a platform for NPEP students to share their voices, explore new ideas, and connect with a broad audience through essays, fiction, poetry, art, and more. Each edition showcases the diverse experiences, creativity, and reflections of students dedicated to personal and intellectual growth.

What began as a collaborative project among passionate students, mentors, and educators has become a cornerstone of the NPEP community, driven by the contributions of talented writers and artists. We are proud to build on the vision that inspired this magazine, made possible by the continued support of dedicated individuals both within and beyond the program.

Published quarterly, the *Insider* reflects the evolving perspectives of students united in their pursuit of meaningful expression.

Disclaimer:

The content, views, and opinions expressed in the *Northwestern Insider* are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of NPEP. The magazine is intended for informational and entertainment purposes only. NPEP makes no representations as to the accuracy or completeness of any information in the *Northwestern Insider* or found by following any link within the magazine. The inclusion of any link or reference does not imply endorsement by NPEP of the linked resources or their content. The author(s) of works published in this publication retain the rights to their work, and any use, reproduction, or distribution of these works requires the explicit consent of the author(s). In this issue of the *Northwestern Insider*, some AI-generated illustrations are used. Curated by the *Northwestern Insider*, all images are used with permission from the AI creators. Any reproduction, distribution, or use of the content without the written permission of the respective owner is strictly prohibited. NPEP disclaims any and all liability for any direct, indirect, incidental, consequential, or punitive damages arising out of the use or inability to use the *Northwestern Insider*.

