

*The magazine of the
Northwestern Prison
Education Program*

NORTHWESTERN INSIDER



VOL. 1, ISSUE 1

About the *Northwestern Insider*



The *Northwestern Insider* is, for many Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) students, a long time coming. Inspired by other publications that they've contributed to, the *Northwestern Insider* aims to be a place where NPEP students can write personal essays, poems, critiques, reviews, fiction, and more. The intention is to publish the *Northwestern Insider* on a quarterly or biannual basis.



The genesis of the *Northwestern Insider* can be attributed to the work of several individuals. But a special shoutout must be made for Tony Triplett. Tony is an NPEP graduate and writing fellow who played an instrumental role in brainstorming, organizing, writing, editing, and shepherding the inaugural issue from idea to publication.



On the outside, Barbara Shwom, Professor of Instruction in Writing Emerita, The Cook Family Writing Program at Northwestern University, and Colin Hanner, a writer and media relations specialist with NPEP, compiled, edited, and designed content for the *Northwestern Insider*.

Opening Remarks

To our students, our community, and those of you whom we may be meeting for the first time,

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the *Northwestern Insider*, the first magazine dedicated to showcasing the work of students from the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP)!

Our students' desire to further their education—beyond the classroom—has resulted in some of the most profound and impactful writing I've had the privilege of reading. In the coming pages, I hope you'll feel the same.



This magazine is the latest in a wave of firsts for NPEP over the past year. The first statewide applications for NPEP went out to facilities throughout Illinois, leading to nearly 400 people applying for spots within our Stateville third and fourth cohorts in the program. (If you applied but were not accepted this time, I encourage you to apply again for future cohorts.)

At Stateville Correctional Center, our students were able to use computers for their coursework for the first time, significantly reducing the time it takes to write papers. On the outside, our first cohort of Justice Fellows are organizing panels to inform the larger community about issues of incarceration.

And on November 15, 2023, we celebrated our first bachelor's degree-seeking cohort graduating from Northwestern University—the first time incarcerated students graduated from a top 10 university in the United States. In 2024, NPEP's next cohort will graduate with their bachelor's degrees, and in 2025, our Logan students will be the first incarcerated women in U.S. history to graduate from a top 10 university.

As amazing as all of these firsts are, it is the powerful sense of community in NPEP—including our students, staff, faculty, volunteers, and loved ones—that sustains me. I hope that the *Northwestern Insider*, from its very first issue, brings us all together, providing yet another way for us to learn together, grieve and celebrate together, and grow together.

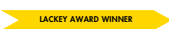
With warm wishes,

Jennifer Lackey, *Founding Director of NPEP*

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ISSUE ONE CONTRIBUTORS

Below, and on the following page, are contributors for *Northwestern Insider's* inaugural issue. Contributors are listed in alphabetical order.



SHURESE RESÉ BAILEY

Shurese is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She wrote the poem "Faith/Fate."



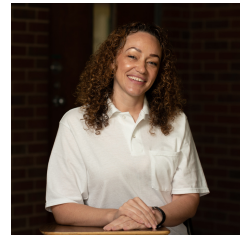
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D.C. is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote "An Open Letter to a Hero."



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Elbonie is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She co-wrote the essay, "Who Does Truth-in-Sentencing Serve?"



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ANTHONY EHLERS

Anthony is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote several articles for this issue, including "Turning Prisons Into Classrooms."



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Miguel is a student in NPEP's third cohort. He wrote "Lucky Cockroach (Cucaracha Suertuda)."



DONNELL GREEN

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Lynn is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote "Updates From The Legislature."



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James is a student in NPEP's fourth cohort. He wrote the poem "Oxytocin."



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Broderick is a student in NPEP's second cohort. He responded to Erika Ray's poetry and is featured as a "Voice From the Outside."



ABDUL-MALIK MUHAMMAD

Malik is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He co-edited the restorative justice column.

Interested in contributing to future issues of the *Northwestern Insider*? Please refer to our submission guidelines and deadlines on page 66.



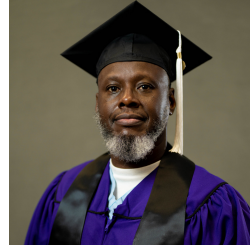
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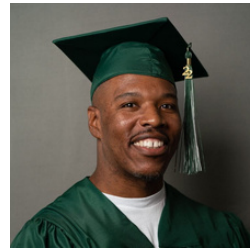
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Chelsea is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She wrote the Lackey Award-winning essay “Bill’s House.”



ERIKA RAY

Erika is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. Several of her poems are featured.



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LeShun is a student in NPEP’s second cohort. He wrote the poem “I’m Right Here.”



BLANCA SOLIS

Blanca is an NPEP student at Logan Correctional Center. She wrote “Education Gave Me a Voice.”



TONY TRIPLETT

Tony is a 2023 NPEP graduate. He wrote several articles for this issue, including “How Northwestern Saved My Life.”



IAN VALENCIA

Ian is a student in NPEP’s fourth cohort. He wrote the poem “Butterfly.”

A black and white line drawing of a stack of books. The books are arranged in a slightly irregular stack, with some pages visible. A purple banner with the word 'EDUCATION' in white capital letters is superimposed over the middle of the stack.

EDUCATION

Turning Prisons Into Classrooms

A recent graduate from the Northwestern Prison Education Program reflects on the importance of education in carceral settings.

By Anthony Ehlers

There is a common misconception that prisons are designed to rehabilitate people, that prisoners receive an education or learn a trade.

In my view, nothing could be further from the truth. Correctional systems don't correct anything. Instead, they resist attempts and opportunities to make you better. They pay lip service to the word "rehabilitation," but then do nothing to help you achieve it.

Instead, it took someone from the outside to see the value in people in prison and to truly provide us with a rehabilitative opportunity.

Her name is Jennifer Lackey. She is the Wayne and Elizabeth Jones Professor of Philosophy at Northwestern University, and the founder and director of the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP).

After teaching two classes at Stateville Correctional Center in 2016 and 2017, Lackey saw first-hand the lack of educational opportunities. But she also saw a thirst for knowledge from her students.

So in 2018, she launched NPEP, an initiative of Northwestern University that partners with Oakton College and the Illinois Department of Corrections.

NPEP was the first degree-granting program in the state providing a full liberal arts curriculum to incarcerated students. The work and content is equivalent to that taught on the Evanston and Chicago campuses.

With great humility and profound happiness, I was one of 20 applicants selected to be in the first cohort of NPEP students.

On Nov. 15, 2023, we made history by graduating with our bachelor's degree from Northwestern — the first incarcerated students in U.S. history to graduate from a top 10 university. Once again, many of us graduated with honors.

If not for Professor Lackey and Northwestern, I would never have received an education.

You see, I have a natural life sentence, and the State of Illinois has a long-standing policy not to bother educating people with long-term sentences.

Since I entered the correctional system, I've tried to get educated. When I was on death row, I tried to take some classes. I was told, "We're going to execute you. It's not worth the time." Fair enough, I suppose.

After I got off death row, I tried once again. Since I already had my GED, I wanted to take some college classes or even some vocational classes. Once again, they said I wasn't worth being educated. "It's a waste of time to educate guys like you," I was told. By "guys like me," he meant those of us with long-term prison sentences.

I've often described incarceration as a "waste management system." Society views us as garbage and throws us away, so opportunities for rehabilitation do not exist. As a byproduct of mass incarceration in the 1990s, college and vocational programs were abandoned. Instead, they turned to warehousing people in increasingly inhumane conditions.

But education is not only important — it is a basic human right that has the power to change lives. Education has the ability to contextualize your past, alter and broaden your outlook on the present, and change your future.

Men and women in prison have made mistakes. Some have hurt people, yet we laugh and cry, struggle and grow like everyone else. To say that we aren't even worth being educated strips us of our humanity. It tells us that we are nothing, that we have no value. That is what they think of us, and it is what they want us to think of ourselves.

When men and women do get out of prison, how can it be in society's best interest for them to get out uneducated? How exactly does that make society safer? An incarcerated person who receives an education makes society safer and this is an investment that society can't afford not to make. Education is a tactic that is already working and it is my belief that it should be a mandatory part of every person's prison sentence.

When COVID-19 hit in the winter of 2020, it changed everything for us. At Stateville, NPEP students were forced to communicate and learn strictly through correspondence.

The lack of classroom setting and isolation were difficult. Men around us died. We lost many friends. I lost my cellmate and best friend James Scott. Some men lost family members at home.

Studying in prison during the best of times is tough, but during COVID this was an unbelievable struggle. But we held onto our education as an anchor amid a shifting sea. The difficulty of our lives and the courses themselves made us struggle to be more, to grow and be better.

Every person in this program has struggled and fought against all odds to learn, to grow, and to become the best versions of themselves. For that reason, it is my belief that the people in this program have self-rehabilitated.

They are smart, and because they are graduates from Northwestern, now the world knows it. They are confident and sure of their own worth. They have a drive to continue to be better. All of us have had goals and aspirations that once seemed like a dream, but now everything feels attainable.

I marvel at the journey I've had. From being homeless and on my own at 13, reading a book by the light of a street lamp, being told over and over that I wasn't worth being educated, that I had no value to now graduating with honors and getting my bachelor's degree. I am a living success story.

With confidence I can say that all of NPEP's graduates and graduates-in-progress are outstanding members of the community here and would be outstanding members of any community in the outside world.

Programs like NPEP are the epitome of what rehabilitation is all about. ▀



NPEP Director Jennifer Lackey speaks to graduates at NPEP's Nov. 15 graduation ceremony at Stateville Correctional Center. (photo: Monika Wnuk)

“These graduates are journalists and teaching fellows, artists and published authors, mentors and restorative justice facilitators. They exude wisdom, compassion, and confidence in leadership. If anyone ever questions the value or impact of education, I'm confident that spending one day with the recent NPEP graduates will change their mind.”

— NPEP Director Jennifer Lackey



Anthony Ehlers (R) and his classmates wait to receive their bachelor's degrees. (photo: Monika Wnuk)

HOW

NORTHWESTERN

SAVED

MY LIFE

By Tony Triplett

I remember dangling in the air, urine flowing down my leg, going in and out of consciousness and seeing the faces of everyone I loved.

Moments of my life flashed before my eyes, right before the sheet snapped from the weight of my body.

Motionless, I lay in my own urine, gasping for air, silently asking myself “Why me?” With a debt of two natural life sentences owed to the state of Illinois, I was constantly questioning my own self-worth, while asking myself, “How can I pay this debt when I have only one life to live?”

I spent the first three years of my forever sentence flirting with Suicide, combatting suicidal thoughts and depression. I had become a seedless flower trying to grow without the soil. My actual innocence was irrelevant because a jury of 12 perceived me to be a monster. Perception is a powerful thing, and I was perceived to be the worst of the worst.

As time passed, Suicide looked more attractive, and on that day, I finally found the courage to ask her out. Turns out I wasn’t her type, but I figured that, sooner rather than later, I’d ask her out again.

Laying in my own urine, I glanced around my 6x9 cell. In the corner of the room sat a course packet called “Values,” the name of a Northwestern University philosophy course I was enrolled in. Staring at the packet, I wondered: where is the value of my own life? Frustrated, I rose to my feet, contemplating if I should ask Suicide out again.

Later that afternoon, I sat in the Values course taught by a professor of philosophy at Northwestern, Jennifer Lackey. Surprisingly, philosophy came easy to me. It left me asking questions, which in turn left me yearning for answers.

The course itself consisted of theories and perspectives of various philosophers from Plato to John Locke, Immanuel Kant and the professor herself. The class was 14 weeks long, and within those weeks I met politicians and other NU professors who wanted to shed a light on mass incarceration through education. Over the weeks, my mindset towards my incarceration started to shift. The crush I had on Suicide was long gone. I had a new crush, and her name was Purpose.

In the next two years, I would take two more of Professor Lackey's philosophy courses and many other courses, too, on topics like political science, poetry, African-American history, restorative justice, and masculinity. Every course played a significant role in my mental health. I no longer wanted to take my life; those classes gave me reasons to cherish life itself. Over time, education had become a well-needed distraction from my attraction to Suicide.

In 2018, Professor Lackey started the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) and suggested that I apply. Sensing my hesitation, Professor Lackey told me, "Tony, you can do this!" Her words ended my conversation with Self-Doubt, and I applied with the hope of getting accepted.

For a month and a half, anxiety flowed through my body uninvited. Frustration would come randomly as well, with a slew of questions: "Am I deserving of this opportunity? Am I Northwestern material? Will I be able to do the work?"

As time passed, my relationship with Purpose started to fade, and Suicide was openly flirting with me again. A rejection letter would send me directly into her arms. Not getting accepted would reinforce the whole "prison process," which is how Suicide and I first met...

When you're newly incarcerated, they take your name and give you a number. To the Illinois Department of Corrections, I am #M38457. Through their actions, they show me that my life doesn't matter. Despite the word corrections being their identity and rehabilitation being their stated mission, I have two natural life sentences, so why even bother in my case? I have to die here. Mentally I was broken and alone, making Suicide the perfect companion. According to my circumstances, the two of us are a perfect match.

For me, Suicide was the only available option. Incarceration gave me a daily dose of reality. Reality showed me who my friends were, constantly reminding me that I was alone, taunting me with my innocence, while highlighting all the tactics used against me. Other options were nonexistent.

Hope would try to show its face, but Reality would intervene, and Time reminded me that I was nothing, just another statistic. My emotions were running rampant. Anxiety played matchmaker, pushing me directly into the arms of Suicide as I waited for the letter that would tell me if I was Northwestern material.

"Congratulations" was the first and only word I saw, simply because I couldn't keep the water out of my eyes. I was accepted. Northwestern had seen something in me. They had resurrected my identity and reunited me with a companion who would always bring out the best in me: Purpose.

On Nov. 15, 2023, I was conferred a Bachelor of Science degree in General Studies, with a major in Social Science, from Northwestern University. I was one of 16 incarcerated students to be the first ever to receive a degree from a top 10 university.

Many universities use the term "diversity" when describing the student body. They all have that school picture that shows students of different backgrounds draped in their school colors. Luckily for me, Northwestern saw the term diversity through a different lens. While most schools see diversity as external, Northwestern views it through a lens of ethics and morality. As a person who comes from marginalization, I viewed my enrollment in Northwestern as a privilege and a saving grace. If it wasn't for Northwestern, I probably would have taken my life.

I'll never forget the day Suicide and I had our first date—and all the following days when I felt like nothing, less than worthless. I wanted to give up and surrender. I'll always cherish the day I found Purpose in an acceptance letter from Northwestern University.

I have the word "Love" tattooed on the web of my right hand and "Life" on my left. "Love Life" is my mantra, and I can honestly say that Northwestern saved mine. Today I write these words as a blossomed rose, nourished by the soil of education. Northwestern University, thank you for saving my life. ▣

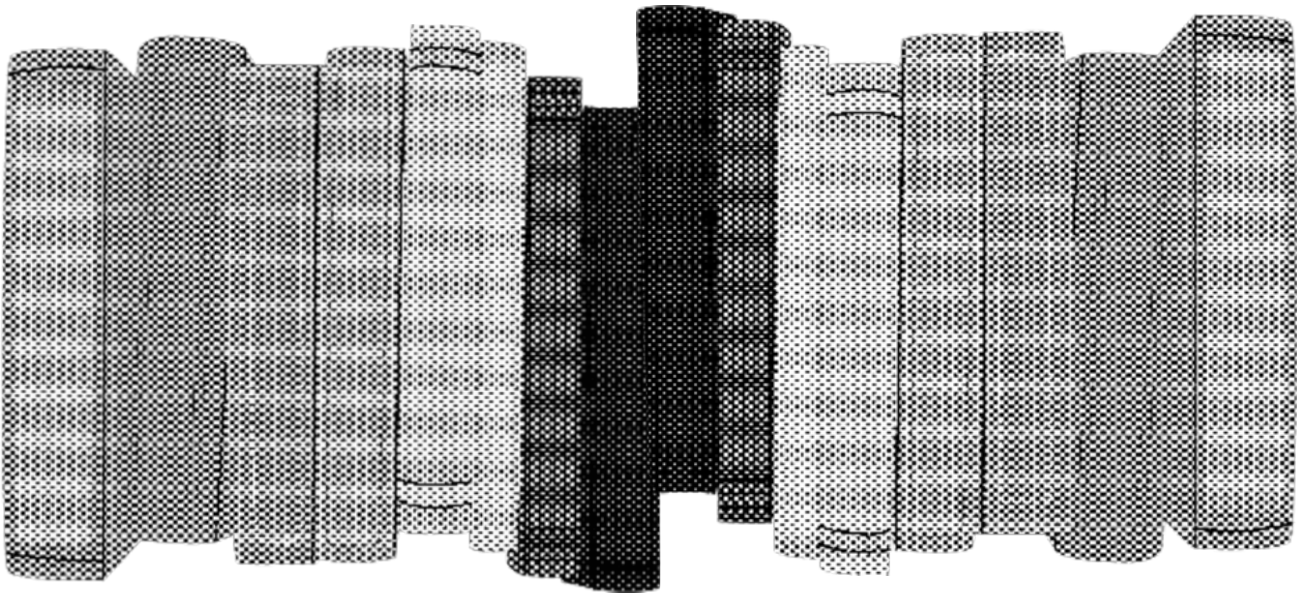
As a Latina and immigrant, I thought that being incarcerated was going to be my biggest battle, but I was wrong. The language barrier was the real monster that I had to face at the beginning of my incarceration, and with that, the feeling of being powerless and voiceless.

So, I targeted education as my main goal and priority, knowing that it was going to be a hard journey. At Logan Correctional Center, we do not have bilingual literacy programs. As a result, I taught myself how to write and read English using ESL books provided by my daughter.

After years, I finally earned my GED, which led to me joining the Helping Paws Programs, where I took a two-year apprenticeship and became a certified service dog trainer. Then, after years of waiting for an opportunity to go to college to continue my education, I was accepted into the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP), where I am currently an undergraduate student.

education gave me a VOICE

By Blanca Solis



Learning English opened educational opportunities for me and gave me a voice. But in my head there is the constant reminder that behind me, a huge population of voiceless non-English-speaking Latinas are screaming for support. The prison system offers no empathy or bilingual literacy programs. My determination to learn the language showed me the struggle that non-English speaking Latinas face to get education and all the benefits it offers.

Prisons are home to Latinas who are eager to learn, and all we need is more support from those who have the power to provide bilingual education and GED classes. With education, Latinas will not only have a voice but they will also be able to take advantage of programs, jobs, and leadership opportunities that will improve their lives and their communities. ▀



**RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE**

Introducing the Restorative Justice Column

By Abdul-Malik Muhammad, Co-Editor, Restorative Justice Column

In NPEP, our restorative justice practice is based on four pillars:

- **Reconciliation** challenges us to make strides to repair any harm that was inflicted on a particular individual or community.
- **Accountability** forces us to acknowledge any wrongdoing and/or harm we have caused.
- **Community** allows us to come together collectively as a group while aiding and assisting one another in our restorative justice (RJ) journey.
- **Empathy** gives us the opportunity to see and feel the pain through the lens of our harmed parties.

With these four pillars, our RJ community has constructed a space and platform rooted in education, a platform through which we can engage in restorative and transformative practices. It also gives a space to showcase our collective and individual growth in rehabilitation, while forming a bridge to seek forgiveness and offer genuine apologies to individuals and communities who have been harmed.

Each issue of the *Northwestern Insider* will include one or more essays that reflect the restorative justice journey of an NPEP student. In addition, the Restorative Justice column will give all NPEP students the opportunity to reflect on a restorative justice prompt, creating a community voice. ▫

What is Restorative Justice?

by Annalise Buth

Annie Buth is Clinical Assistant Professor of Law in the Center on Negotiation, Mediation, and Restorative Justice at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law and supports NPEP's restorative justice program.

There is not a singular definition of restorative justice, and it can be viewed as a framework, theory of justice, set of practices, movement, or way of life.

Current restorative justice praxis is influenced by streams of practice in Indigenous Peacemaking, faith traditions, schools, criminal legal systems, and other communities.

Restorative justice emphasizes a relational, value-based approach to creating healthy and equitable communities in an interconnected world and repairing harm when there is a breakdown in relationships.

Accordingly, it requires a shift in thinking about crime. It focuses on the impact of harm rather than merely the guilt of someone who has broken a law.

Restorative justice centers on taking responsibility, remorse, reparation, and healing instead of punishment, and it recognizes the transformational power of stories for connection.

An Indigenous Writing of Hope

By Patty Ouska,
Co-Editor, Restorative
Justice Column

Often times, I struggle with my words when I am emotionally overwhelmed or simply unable to find the right words to describe what I want to convey. At those times, I look to the words of others.

I want to share with you something I borrowed from Mark Charles and Soong Chan Rah titled, “The Discipline of Watching the Sunrise” and then, on the following page, reflect on what watching the sunrise means to me and to us all:

“One of the most beautiful, beneficial, and sacred disciplines I have incorporated in my life is the discipline of watching the sunrise. It's one thing to watch the sunrise a couple times a year, perhaps on Easter for a sunrise service or when you have a 6 a.m. flight ... but it is another thing altogether to intentionally rise five or six mornings a week and to be in a posture of prayer while watching the sun come up over the horizon.

“When you do it day after day, week after week, month after month, and eventually year after year ... subtle changes become glaring.

“Every morning in the spring, the sun moves just a little further north; every morning in the fall, the sun inches a bit further south. The birds come and go, migrating in the general direction of the sun's path. It is quiet. In the spring, the sun rises just a minute or two earlier as the days grow long, and the earth warms as it begins to wake up. And in the fall, the sunrise happens just a minute or two later as the earth cools and prepares to go to sleep.

“But the biggest benefit from this discipline of watching the sunrise has come not from enjoying the beauty or even experiencing the seasons, but from an understanding much deeper in my soul. ... The longer I was privileged to see the masterful and artistic genius of Creator, and the longer I was blessed to stand in the midst of the grandeur of this masterpiece, the easier it became to acknowledge that neither I, nor all of humankind for that matter was in control. ... This work of art, this amazing ongoing, beautifully choreographed production, is our blessing to observe, it is our privilege to participate in, and even our solemn responsibility to steward. But it is not ours to control.”

Over the years, I've learned that one of the best ways to remind myself of my limitations is to follow the example of my ancestors: to rise early in the morning and greet the sunrise.

Recently, for the first time in three decades, I was on the other side, driving down I-55 for hours on my way to a court writ. It was early, but I did not close my eyes at all. For I saw the sun rise from a different window, a different perspective. I was given renewed faith and hope.

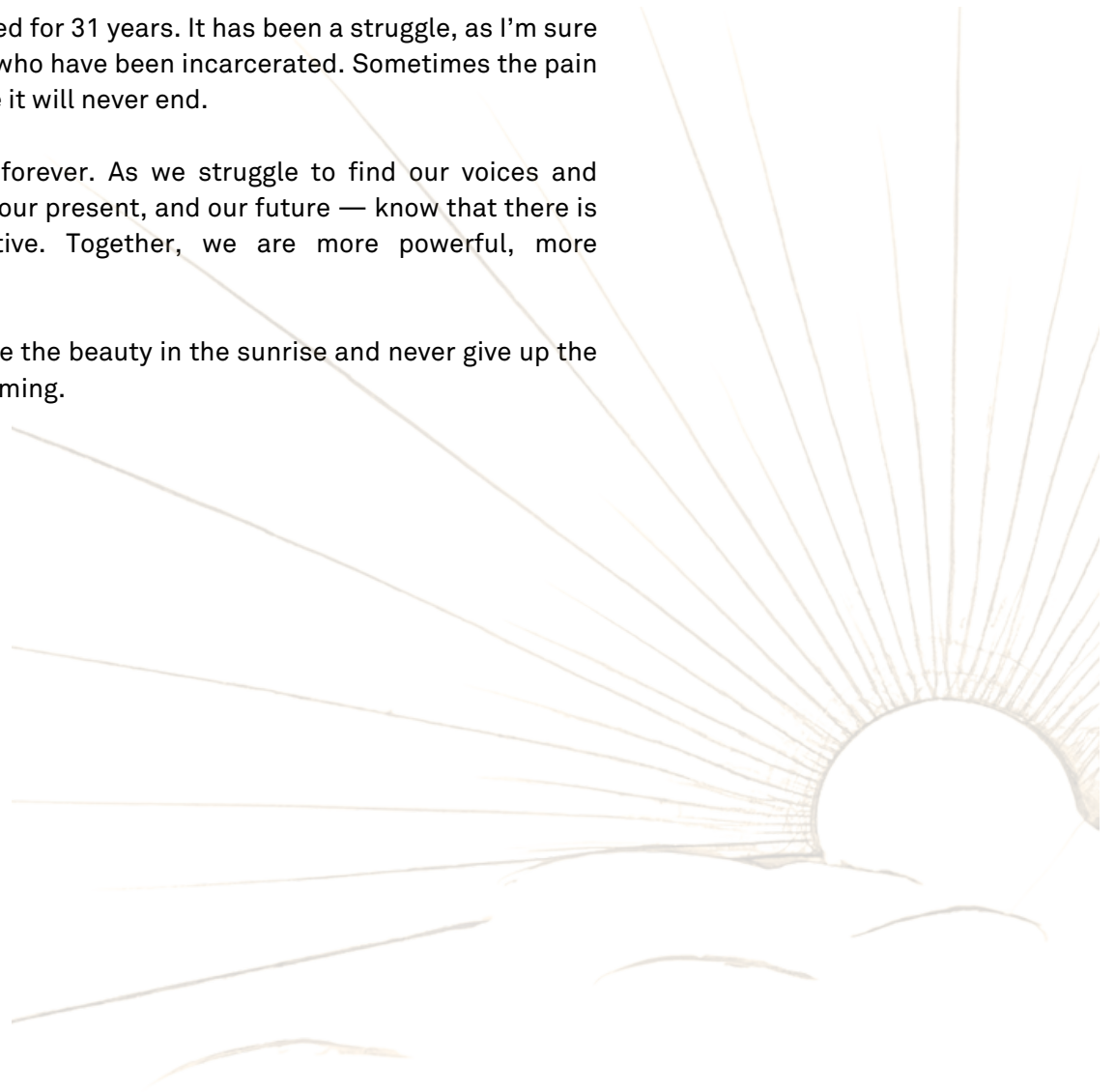
On my drive back to Logan on I-55, I was overwhelmed. I was able to breathe — the air was different. To me, this was hope.

I have been incarcerated for 31 years. It has been a struggle, as I'm sure it has for many of you who have been incarcerated. Sometimes the pain and suffering feels like it will never end.

But know this is not forever. As we struggle to find our voices and stories — in our past, our present, and our future — know that there is power in the collective. Together, we are more powerful, more profound.

My hope is that you see the beauty in the sunrise and never give up the hope that change is coming.

In solidarity,
Patty Ouska



Community Prompt:

What Gives You Hope?

Robert Boyd: “Waking up every morning is a chance to do things differently and better.”

Michael Broadway: “My grandchildren.”

Elbonie Burnside: “Hope is a powerful thing during a time of oppression. It is light in a time of darkness, and it is what gives you strength when you have nothing. I have hope for a better community and a more inclusive society without social injustices. I have hope for me evolving as a person and for my liberation. Without hope there is no true liberation for me, so I hang on to hope as hard as I can. Without hope I have nothing.”

Jeffery Campbell: “My faith in Allah.”

Vanecha Cooper: “What gives me most hope is that while I cannot undo my past transgressions, God can heal me from the effects of them, allowing me to walk into a promising and fulfilling destiny (II Corinthians 5:17).”

Lynn Green: “Living restoratively.”

Regina DeFrancisco: “Hope to me is the shining light you can see around a closed door.”

Mark Dixon: “Every day that I am alive, I get another chance to make my life whatever I desire it to be. To me, that is powerful.”

Craig B. Harvey: “My mother’s sobriety!”

Bernard McKinley: “Knowing my purpose.”

Flynard Miller: “Education gives me hope.”

Abdul-Malik Muhammad: “Having an amazing attorney and legal team that’s fighting to have me released — it gives me hope!”

Leon Robinson: “Having faith in God.”

Irene Romaniuk: “Hope will motivate you to live a meaningful, productive, and happy life. Hope will challenge you to live your best and to fulfill your potential. Never let go of hope. One day, when what you have always wished for has finally come to be, you will look back and laugh at what has passed. You will ask yourself, ‘How did I get through all of that?’ Hope is the answer.”

Kevin Scott: “Our NPEP family that has invested in our future!”

James Soto: “Education as an equalizer.”

Bonnie Shelesney: “Hope is intention and effort progressing along universal synchronicities.”

Orlando Watkins: “My quest for freedom and education.”

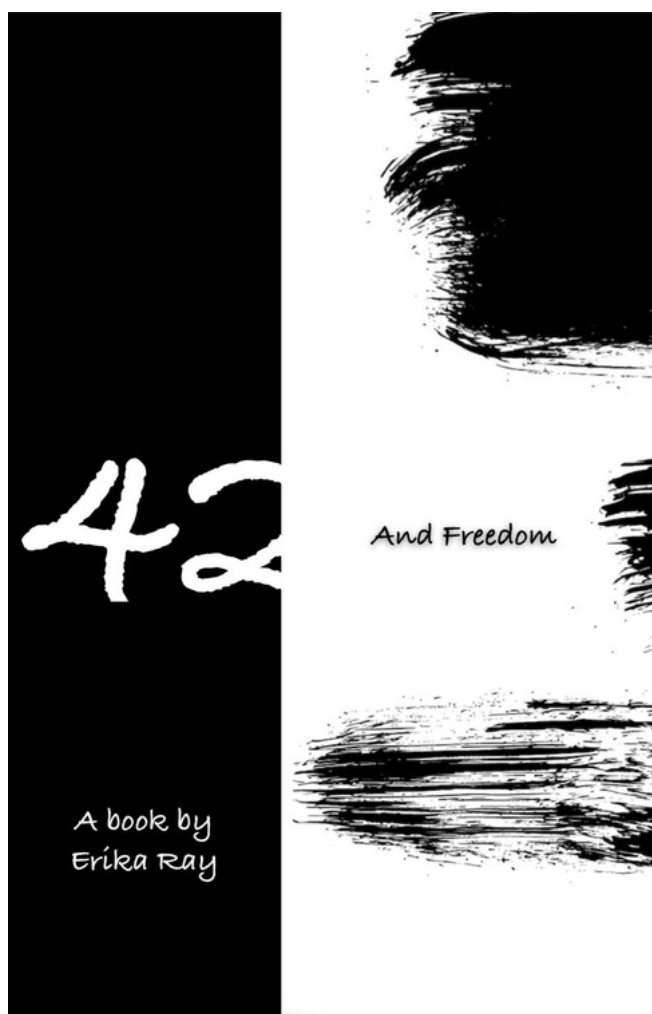


**REVIEWS &
RESPONSES**

CALL & RESPONSE: **42 AND FREEDOM**

To celebrate the release of NPEP student Erika Ray's new collection of poetry *42 and Freedom*, the *Northwestern Insider* has published four of her poems. Two NPEP students, Dré Patterson and Broderick Hollins, respond with their reactions after reading.

"*42 and Freedom* is a collection of poetry I put together with the hope of expressing a reality that some women and girls, especially those of color, encounter," Erika said. "While writing these poems, it was my hope to thread together how we survive racism, sexual violence, systemic violence, and rejection while highlighting the resilience of melanated people. Once a person is incarcerated, everything is stripped away; this often includes self-care. Creating this project was my year-long commitment to self-care."



What I Choose

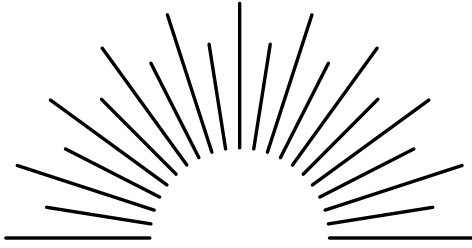
By Erika Ray

Every day I choose to go on living
in an unsteady world that makes
death seems easy
there are no passions here

and dreams are a nostalgic imaginary indulgence
for those who cannot pass go
or collect their things and spring forward from
the days that bleed and blend into each other

no sunrise or pink moons
to capture the breath
of dreaming mothers
but we go on living

hoping for a steady world
that will make us fear death



Response

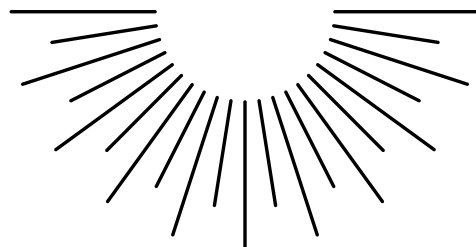
By Dré Patterson

Sis came out swinging with a soul-piercing sword. I immediately felt Mother Soyini's Poetry and Performance class reflexively kick in. I'm noticing how the enjambments Erika uses reflect the meaning, how the words dictate the pace.

If you are reading this out loud, each line bleeds and blends into the next with no chance to catch your literal breath—or mental breath, if you are reading silently. There's no period, no comma, no grammatical symbol that signals your consciousness to pause. I especially like these last lines:

*hoping for a steady world
that will make us fear death*

It expresses the existential anxiety that prisoners feel daily, questioning whether death would be more welcome than this.



Unheard Women Poets

By Erika Ray

don't you think you should be quiet
yes, I know you can talk
manipulate words and verbs
in ways that make me feel heard

heard is what you should
aim not to be
use your gift of beauty
and become a part of the scenery

in stillness

a girl and woman's place

don't be too much Ntozake
or too wrapped up in Nikki Giovanni
or overgrown in the sounds or talking
back of bell hooks

what sound can you make
if your mouth is closed?
if the vibration of words stops
before they leave your soul

poet

they won't call you
because you owe a woman's debt
poet they won't call you
because they have not heard you yet.

Response

By Broderick Hollins

“42 and Freedom” is energy to us
impacted by the system, a powerful
tool to get us by. “Unheard Women
Poets” is no different.

Acknowledging this and speaking
your mind through pen and paper is
more valuable than speaking out
loud—because with your words in
writing we can go back and grab
onto your thoughts and your voice.

Another Poet

By Erika Ray

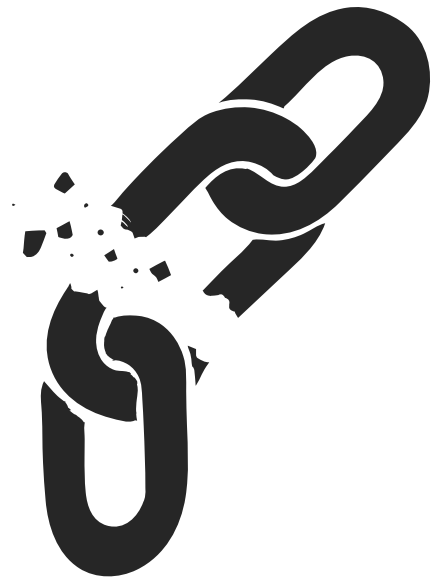
I am just another poet, so as you can imagine/ words roll off my lips easily, like the spreading of jam instead of jelly/ I am just another poet. When I write, memories of Suge in her sexy sparkly red dress flood me/ because I am sister/ A Sister Poet/ speaking for me, you, her, us, all women/ an unheard poet/ locked inside of a fearless warrior/ I am just another poet, words spilling from my pen like white excited eyes watching "Gone with the Wind"/ I am a poet/ just another poet, beautifully black like Sydney/ profoundly majestic like Ava/ unearthly phenomenal like Maya/ I am just another poet/ draped in dreams/ dripping with an incentive for her/she/they that are brave enough to step in front of my words/ I am just another poet/ just another/ just another/ another/ poet.

Response (a poem)

By Dré Patterson

I thought I was brave enough –
She told me there was an incentive
If I just stood there and took the shots
No cover up.
But I had on a vest.
As her words pummeled me with the sharpness of body piercing
Armor piercers,
I realized that I wasn't actually being
Brave.
I shed the vest.
Stop
 Hiding
That's what I'm talkin' 'bout.
She took aim.
I poked out my chest like I thought a man was
Supposed to do,
Secretly hoping that I would be immune to her arsenal
Like the Oankal
In an Octavia Butler story.

But the very first shot
Was to the dome,
Piercing my psyche
Threatening to
Free me.
As I lost consciousness
I asked
Do I really want this
Free "dome"?



Prone To

By Erika Ray

Stokely Carmichael
believed that a Black woman does her best
work in the prone position

Someone should tell him that she is now prone to

- intimate partner violence
- incarceration
- isolation
- sullenness
- silence

all things you have to lay down for.

Response

By Dré Patterson

This piece hits hard. I first came across this quote by Stokely Carmichael a year or so ago. He was pushing back against the Black feminist voice calling for Black women to have more equitable positions within the various civil rights movements: “the only position for women in SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] is prone.”

I had to look up prone: “laying flat or prostrate.”

What? Fighting against the oppressor and you oppressing your closest “rappie” (co-defendant)!

Shining a Light on the Criminal Legal System

In her recent book, Criminal Testimonial Injustice, NPEP Founding Director and Northwestern Professor of Philosophy Jennifer Lackey touches on a subject most choose to overlook.

By Tony Triplett

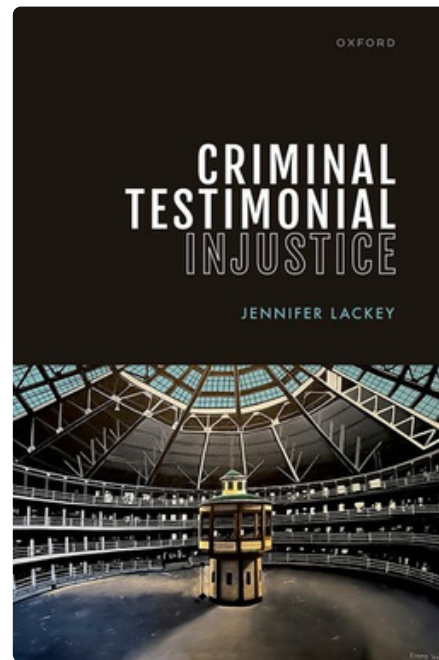
Seeing something and saying something are two different things. The problems within our criminal legal system are among those things that everyone sees, but very few acknowledge. When it comes to mass incarceration, the discourse surrounding it is endless. Unfortunately, mass incarceration is just the sum of the equation; very few people focus on the exponent in parentheses, known as the criminal legal system, the creator of mass incarceration.

In her recent book *Criminal Testimonial Injustice*, Northwestern philosophy professor Jennifer Lackey dives headfirst into shortcomings of the criminal legal system through highlighting the various harms and injustices that are endured before incarceration and that contribute to mass incarceration. Lackey provides a philosophical blueprint of the intentional tactics perpetuated by various agents of the criminal legal system. Examining the actions of prosecution, judges, defense attorneys, and police detectives, Lackey offers an up-close personal view of the “manipulative, deceptive, or coercive tactics that are used to subvert justice.”

For example, when police or government attorneys extract testimony from a suspect and that testimony is given “an unwarranted excess of credibility, the individuals in question are the victims of agential testimonial injustice.” Juries are bullied into believing that the lies suspects are coerced into telling are more credible than the truth those suspects tell in court.

What makes this book so compelling is that Lackey forces the reader to look through the lens of her Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) students, the victims of the criminal legal system — us — who are the unfortunate recipients of mass incarceration. Unlike most books that solely rely on statistical data, *Criminal Testimonial Injustice* also recounts the personal experiences that were endured by real-life incarcerated individuals, whose mass incarceration ironically gave them the opportunity to become Northwestern students and alumni. In short, Lackey offers a voice to the voiceless.

We’ve all seen the statue of Lady Justice, tall and regal as she stands upright holding a scale. I assumed this represented equality. But when I looked closely at the scale, I noticed that one side outweighs the other.



NPEP Graduate Anthony Ehlers painted the front cover of Criminal Testimonial Injustice.

The statue is looking away blindfolded. Lackey’s book forces us to rip off the blindfold and acknowledge that problems of injustice exist within our criminal legal system.

Criminal Testimonial Injustice shows the flip side of the coin that law schools might gloss over. The criminal legal system is biased, and if that is recognized and acknowledged, we can see that it is constructed to oppress specific groups of people.

When I received two natural life sentences for crimes I didn’t commit, my assumptions about the legal system were confirmed. I realized that equality and justice were luxuries allotted to a certain group of people. As a product of marginalization, I will never have the privilege of equality and justice. Lackey’s book offers some hope that the legal system will take her criticism to heart and eliminate legal testimonial injustice in favor of a desire to get at the truth and achieve true justice. ■

CRIMINAL TESTIMONIAL INJUSTICE SYMPOSIUM AT STATEVILLE CC

On Sept. 29, 2023, Northwestern students, alumni, and professors gathered at Stateville Correctional Center to discuss Jennifer Lackey's new book, *Criminal Testimonial Injustice*. Six NPEP students and seven legal scholars and philosophers were given time to respond to the book.

This was a two-day event; the first day took place a hundred yards from the facility's "round house," or the "panopticon" as it's otherwise known (it is also the image used for the cover of Lackey's book). The second day was held on Northwestern's Evanston campus.



(photo credit: Monika Wnuk)



(photo credit: Monika Wnuk)

“ [In *Criminal Testimonial Injustice*]
Lackey exposes the unseemly underbelly of our so-called criminal justice system, revealing the nefarious tactics, machinations and ploys that are employed by police investigators, prosecutors, judges and even some defense attorneys, to coerce defendants to accept guilty pleas, to elicit false witness testimony, and to obtain false confessions, irrespective of the defendants’ actual guilt or innocence.”

— NPEP Graduate William Peoples (pictured), who was one of six NPEP students featured on the panel



INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

JANICE NORA LACKEY AWARD FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

NPEP is proud to announce the winners and honorable mentions from the inaugural Janice Nora Lackey Award for Academic Excellence, named in honor of Janice Nora Lackey (1940–2012), who was a lifelong learner, a believer in the uniquely empowering nature of education, and the inspiration for the founding of the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP).

To be eligible for the Lackey award, an essay must have been written for an NPEP course. NPEP received more than 20 essay submissions for consideration. Each essay was read by two members of an anonymous panel of three NPEP faculty members, who provided notes and a preliminary assessment. Essays that received two positive votes were then read by the third committee member. All of the essays were discussed and evaluated against the criteria identified in the award announcement: clarity of writing, creativity, argumentative strength, and level of development.

Winners:

Chelsea Raker, “Bill’s House”

William Peeples, “Obliterating the Hydra of Oppression”

Honorable Mentions:

Joyce McGee, “Weekends at the Robert Taylor Homes”

D.C. Crite, “Untitled”

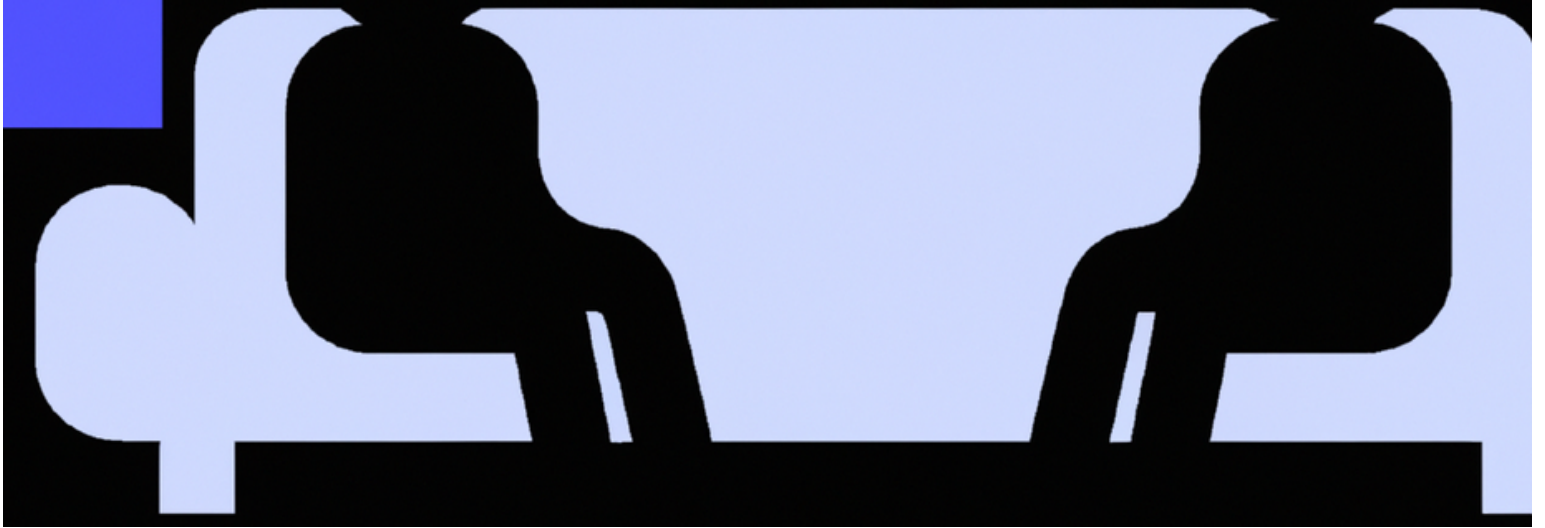
Readers can find the two winning essays on the following pages.

This annual award is supported by a donation from Jennifer Lackey, Baron Reed, Isabella Reed, and Catherine Reed. Below is a drawing of Janice Nora Lackey, created by Anthony Ehlers, an NPEP graduate.



BILL'S HOUSE

By Chelsea Raker



The trap was my haven, my hell, and my first classroom. “The trap” is just another way to say, crack house, stash spot, or dope house. In my culture, it’s a noun and a verb.

It’s a place as well as a lifestyle. To me, it is an acronym that stands for: take risks and prosper. This motto became my own. Where I’m from, people risk it all for the almighty dollar. To me, the trap is exactly how it sounds, a trap. Once you’re in that life, getting out proves to be difficult, or nearly impossible. Typically, the only way out is in a box — either the one in the ground or the one up state. In other words, you die or you go to jail.

I was born into this life. I’m a trap baby, or product of my environment. My father was a drug dealer and my mom struggled with addiction. My parents split up and my mom couldn’t take care of me, so I stayed at the trap spot on Chatham Street with my dad. His friend Bill owned the place. Bill was a Vietnam vet with a drug and alcohol problem. I would come to live at his house many times growing up, with and without my father. The first time I lived there I was in pre-kindergarten.

As a young child, I would go to Bill’s house after school to find him sitting on the couch. Often, he had circled my name in the newspaper. They would print a list of high honor roll students.

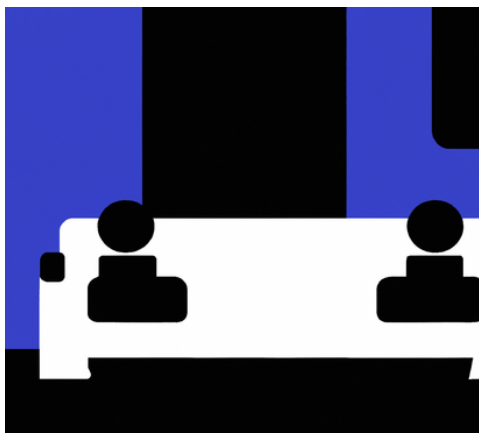
My name would never fail to be on that list. But while I would go to school and learn one thing, learning to think with a street mentality was another thing entirely. I often felt like two different people and had a really hard time not letting what happened to me outside of school affect me while I was there. After school, I had a whole different set of lessons to learn. I learned something new every day.

Eventually, my dad started doing more drugs than he was selling and had worn out his welcome with old man Bill. No matter how many times I moved away, somehow, I always ended up back at the trap spot on the bottom of that dead street. The dead-end sign on the street reminded me that I was on a road, mentally, and physically, that led nowhere.

The house itself was big and covered in spray paint. Like many other things in the neighborhood, it had been tagged by the Bloods. The Bloods were a predominant gang on the south and east side of Savannah. By spray painting the house they made it known that the house was Blood territory. The front door of the house led straight to the living room, which was largely dominated by the couch. It is the couch that I remember the most. It was gigantic, and probably older than I am now.

Like everything else in Bill's house, it had been tinted yellow by the thick cloud of smoke that was ever present in the air. That dingy couch was surprisingly comfortable. Many times it harbored me in my time of need.

During the day, old man Bill sat on the couch smoking paper joints and chasing his vodka with beer. I would watch him and his many friends smoke his weed and drink his booze. Bill was a type 2 diabetic, and his hands shook badly. He soon taught my nimble fingers to roll his weed for him — one of my many lessons. When the sun was up the drug dealers and gang members, who considered the trap their place of business, mostly kept the kitchen, the garage, or the front porch. These are the men I looked up to because unlike my father, Bill, or his friends, these men were not content with their life. They wanted more. They wanted better. They would get what they wanted by any means necessary.



Most nights, when Bill retired to his bedroom, Peezy ran the house. Peezy was a general, or high ranking member of Blood, that called the shots in the neighborhood. Everyone that came and went knew that Bill claimed me as his granddaughter. I wasn't but the notion saved me some trouble — sometimes. Peezy was a man who always seemed to be in a hurry. He was usually angry, but had a rare smile that captivated the room. Much like many of the thugs that came around, Peezy liked me, but he didn't call me "sis" like the other guys did. Peezy did not look at me with brotherly love. What he felt for me was much more primal. When he smiled at me, I felt as if I was prey, being hunted, and that his smile was only intended to lure me in.

When I was barely 13, I had graduated from sleeping on the floor of the laundry room, to having a spot on the couch in the living room. That time in my life, my father was M.I.A. My mother was in Lee Arrendale State Prison, in Alto, Georgia.

I was state property. I ran away from foster care and Bill took me in, again. I had a couch-mate named C.J. He was 18 and had just gotten out of the county jail. My bond with C.J. would be a pivotal one in my young life.

I remember one night in particular, when C.J. had been coming in late and sleeping on the other end of the couch for about a week, I had a really bad feeling. No longer able to pretend to sleep, I sat up on the dirty, L-shaped sectional, and prepared to run. I remember feeling relieved that I had learned to sleep with my shoes on.

Honestly, it wasn't C.J. giving me the bad feeling. Secretly, I felt safer with him around. He had never bothered me and Bill told me that he was "all right," so I wasn't as concerned with his close proximity as I was with the tension rolling off of the men who had passed through the living room on the way to conduct their nightly business in the kitchen. My main cause of concern was that Peezy would be looking for a stress reliever when his dealings were done. More than once he had sought me out as a distraction after having a "bad night." It made me sick to think that I would, again, be the object of his desire. Especially now that C.J. was there, inevitably leaving a witness, or worse, to my demise. I couldn't stomach the thought of that, so I was going to disappear. Disappearing was something I was good at since more often than not, I was technically a missing person. I usually stayed off the streets at night, taking refuge on Bill's couch if I could because a kid outside after dark drew unnecessary attention.

I felt stuck. Like I was bound to a way of life that I hated. I had chosen the streets, or rather, I felt that the streets had chosen me. While it was a dangerous way to live, I preferred it to the system. I blamed my parents for exposing me and then abandoning me in the trenches. There are serious risks that come with sleeping in a trap house. Being hit by a bullet that was intended for someone else was only one possible scenario. Knowing what Peezy would do to me, it was somehow not the worst one I could think of at the time.

Looking back on the night, I remember, the feeling in the pit of my stomach only getting worse. Then C.J. changed everything. “Hey Ma, you good over there?” he asked from the other end of the couch. He actually looked concerned. I remember realizing that before that moment, I had only ever heard him speak in hushed tones. I was always pretending to sleep, but just then, his voice wrapped around me like a blanket. He slid closer to me and I flinched. “Yo, relax Ma, look at me,” he cajoled, his tone gentle yet commanding. The louder the men in the next room got, the closer I was to running.

I realize now how afraid I probably looked at that moment. I’m still embarrassed by how jumpy and disheveled I was. “Look, the old man only let me kick it if I make sure nun’ happens to you. We good over here,” he assured me pulling a .357 revolver from his waistband. He set it on his lap and rested his hand on the firearm as if the contact put him perfectly at ease. What struck me the most was that he said, “we,” like I wasn’t alone. My face must have portrayed the uncertainty I felt in that moment, because he looked at me and with a heavy sigh said, “OK, trap baby here.”

This time he pulled a 9 mm pistol from the back of his pants. Gripping it by the barrel, he held it out for me to take. To this day, I do not remember reaching for the gun but all of a sudden it was in my hand, the weight of the cold black steel was overwhelmingly empowering, but I felt like the weight of the world had been suddenly lifted from my shoulders. I recall briefly wondering why I wasn’t afraid of the gun, why my hands had quit shaking, and why I could no longer hear my heartbeat. I almost thanked him, but didn’t, already feeling ashamed for showing weakness. Instead, I checked the chamber, it was loaded. I remember him telling me that I, “should never be in a war zone without a weapon.” From then on, I kept one on me.

On the couch at that moment, I felt as if I didn’t have to conform or live in fear of any man.



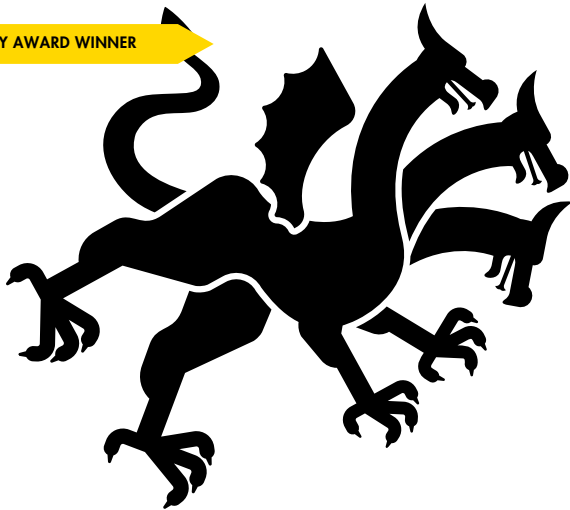
I could hold my head high. That gun became an extension of my body. It was just as much a part of me as my fingers or my toes. I slept with it under my face like it was a pillow. I lived by it.

I thought that eventually, I’d die by it. That couch proved to be a place of transition for me. Looking back on that night I should’ve ran.

Thirteen years later, I replay that night in my head and think about how the men in that house, and the moments on that couch, taught me to be a little weapon. It turned me into something I did not want to be. Raised by the streets, I hustled and survived. I was held captive by a way of life. I look around now and face the reality that I am now held captive because of the way I went in life. Despite all of the odds, I’ve grown in these forsaken places. No longer on that dead end road, I put these memories behind me. I have learned many lessons, most of them the hard way, and now I can just be.

I don’t know when I’ll make it home, but in my mind I’m already free. ▣

LACKEY AWARD WINNER



OBLITERATING THE HYDRA OF OPPRESSION

By William Peoples

The year is 2022, when Dr. Hannibal Jackson, a young, Black sociologist and inventor Dr. Nzinga Duboise invent a time machine.

Jackson and Duboise have been friends since their childhood days as members of Jack and Jill. Hannibal loves social theory and is a big fan of Karl Marx. Nzinga, a staunch Black-Feminist theory fan, adores Kimberle Crenshaw and her ideas on intersectionality. Nzinga suggests that they travel back in time to retrieve Marx, bring him to 2022 and introduce him to Crenshaw, allowing the two writers to converse about their theories, their common ground, and their points of contention.

Karl Marx, deemed the Father of Social-Conflict Theory, argues that society is comprised of class divisions that ensure wealth and power accrue to the upper classes, who determine and control the "means of production" to subjugate the working class; and that the law is used to reify and enforce class assignments. Marx argues that the concepts of "private property" and "rule of law" work hand-in-hand to protect the bourgeoisie and control the proletariat's socio-economic reality. Marx further asserts that the only cure for this ailment is the obliteration of privatization, state ownership of all means of production, and the distribution of wealth equally among all citizens, thus destroying the concept of socio-economic class.

Conversely, Kimberle Crenshaw posits that, not just class but also race and gender play a significant part in how the law is utilized to maintain social control and legitimize exclusionary and discriminatory practices; and that the law's blindness to the realities of race and gender intersectionality in depriving people of equality of opportunity ensures socio-economic disparity.

We now fast-forward to a coffee shop in Bronzeville, a historically Black neighborhood in Chicago. Nzinga and Crenshaw are seated on one side of the booth, and Hannibal and Marx are seated opposite them. The waitress, a pretty, dark-complexioned Black woman, takes their order; she pauses, staring at Marx and the funny clothes he's wearing. She smiles but decides not to comment on his outdated attire. When she departs, Hannibal explains why he brought these two together. Both are eager to do theoretical battle, and Marx concedes to let Crenshaw fire the first salvo of argumentative points. Hannibal and Nzinga pull out their notebooks to preserve this historic event for posterity.

CRENSHAW: *Comrade Marx, first let me assure you that, though we disagree on some points in our beliefs, I am nonetheless a huge admirer of much of your ideas and writings. I also want you to know I come as both teacher and student, as I believe this exchange will be mutually enlightening and beneficial.*

With that said, let me begin my critique by pointing out the obvious: your theory fails to take into account the reality of race and gender oppression, as well as the historical implications of white supremacy, and the concept of white privilege as it pertains to law, and its utilization by those in power to effectively sustain a permanent underclass, as well as to create sub-categories of the proletariat class that ensures perpetual division amongst all workers based upon each fighting against the other to obtain, and maintain, personal interests and goals.

MARX: Comrade Crenshaw, first thank you for your gracious comments. Now, to counter your point. Can you not see how divisive your theory is to begin with? In effect, you do the work of the bourgeoisie by highlighting external differences like race, skin color, and sex. My ideas are predicated upon the universality and generality of the working class's subjugation and oppression for the benefit and ease of the upper classes. In my theory there is no color, race, or sex. We are all one and must unite like the fingers of a hand to form a clenched fist and smash the machine of privatization, means of production, and property laws that uphold and ensure the existence of capitalism!

CRENSHAW: Brother Marx, with all due respect, you are arguing your point from a social context that no longer exists! At the time of your writings, you were in a homogeneous society, patriarchy prevailed, and ideas of the equality of the sexes or women's rights were not even under discussion. Additionally, you fail to take into account the legal history of my country.

America, at its inception, was founded by white, land-owning men, for white, land-owning men. Blacks—the kidnapped and enslaved Africans (as well as their future offspring, into perpetuity)—were considered, literally, three-fifths human. Even post-slavery this country enacted Black-codes, passed Jim Crow laws, and legalized exclusionary tactics that negatively impact Black Folks generally, and also coalesce into a "Bird-Cage" like structure, what I call intersectionality, that operates on a Racial+ Gender level of oppression that whites in their myopic "white normativity" fail to see, and likewise Black men in their racially singular perspective fail to acknowledge and implement strategies to combat.

Lastly, even white feminists in their "I am woman, hear me roar" ideology neglect the reality that Black women, historically, were/are not deemed as "women" in the same patriarchal sense that white women are.

MARX: Touché, comrade Crenshaw, you make very valid and undeniable points. Still, I implore you to see reason! If the proletariat class first establishes common ground as workers, and our unification unseats the bourgeoisie from their throne, we can then, at our leisure, combat the inequalities of race, gender, and even this sexual-orientation stuff I've heard about during my brief stay in your time.

Change, my dear sister, occurs in increments, and the first step is to overthrow capitalistic oppression of all people irrespective of color, race, gender, etc...

CRENSHAW: I feel you, brother Karl, but check this out! Blacks joined with the colonists during the Revolutionary War, and after they helped expel the British, white folks repaid them with the gift that kept on giving, chattel slavery, so thanks, but no thanks! The reality is if we start by "freeing" from socio-economic oppression the Black woman, who is arguably the most oppressed person in society, then by virtue of that, we dismantle, and render inoperable, all societal mechanisms of oppression, legal or otherwise, that all others face as well.

MARX: [Bows his head in a gesture of humility and acquiescence and proclaims] *Hail the Black woman! You have convinced me that my theory must be modified if it is to defeat the hydra of class, race, and gender oppression. That said, I really must be going, my wife will have my head on a pike if I don't make it home for supper on time!*

All four people rise from the booth, and Crenshaw shakes Marx's hand, thinks better of it, and gives him a companionly hug, too. Marx a bit taken aback by the forwardness of women in this new time, smiles and bows to Crenshaw, and then Nzinga. He turns to Hannibal and says, "Dear fellow I've enjoyed my time, but please take me home." Hannibal smiles sheepishly and replies, "I'm the sociologist of the group, Nzinga is the brains that invented the machine. I don't even know how to turn it on." They all laugh, and Nzinga takes Marx back to the machine to send him home.

In conclusion: Although Marx and Crenshaw differ in terms of the position of importance of color, race, and gender in the system of capitalistic oppression, they agree that the law was created, and designed, to protect and reify capitalism via property-rights, means of production, and class subjugation. Crenshaw's emphasis on race and gender as components of legal mechanisms of control is one that those who fight oppression ignore at their own peril. Intersectionality is real, white supremacy is real, and these facts have historical and future relevance in how anti-racial and anti-discriminatory challenges and rulings are handled by our judiciary. ■



HOW ADVERSARIES FOUND

I was just informed that a federal prosecutor wants to speak with me. I'm in prison, so the last person I want to speak with is a prosecutor. I'm dissatisfied with my sentence and being held against my free will. A prosecutor put me where I am now.

But the meeting with him was unavoidable. As part of the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP), my fellow students and I are taking a legal studies class. Our professor, Terrence Truax, has been teaching us about the evolving nuances of the 14th Amendment. So, Terrence thought, it would be beneficial to have a prosecutor speak to our class.

To my surprise, it was not just any prosecutor but Ian Gershengorn — the former acting United States Solicitor General under President Barack Obama.

Thirty-five-foot prison walls obstructed any hopes of evading the meeting in the first place, but now, the prospect of engaging with someone like Ian intrigued me. To converse with a man deeply intertwined with history felt like pulling on a thread that connected past and present.

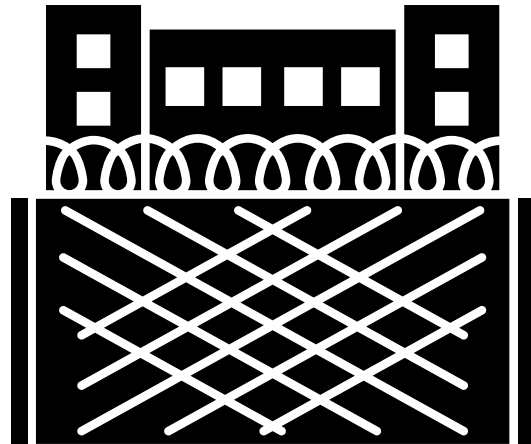
And, I admit, I thought the meeting could have the potential to inspire him to work further with us and create a phenomenon inside Stateville Correctional Center. I'm confident there is a place where incarcerated people and judicial officials from our nation's capital can meet with the goal of starting new movements. A place where we can have our calls echoed, our stories circulated, and our value amplified. One can dream.

Our meeting took place within the education block at Stateville Correctional Center. Sitting at desks in a Northwestern-purple classroom adorned with a silhouette of the Chicago skyline, my fellow students and I faced a TV that Zoomed us to Ian's Washington D.C. office, mere blocks from the U.S. Capitol.

There I was, in a building that was nearly uninhabitable, while he sat in an office close to the most omnipotent piece of land in the world. It was a surreal paradox. Yet, though we were separated by circumstance, I soon discovered that we were more alike than I had thought.

COMMON GROUND

By Donnell Green



Despite the physical and metaphorical distance that separated us, I discovered that Ian was not the larger-than-life figure I had imagined. He spoke in measured tones, casually recounting his experiences with Supreme Court justices. At one point, the discussion turned to detainees' rights at Guantanamo Bay, revealing Ian's surprising empathy for the incarcerated who, in some cases, endured decades without due process.

To break any sort of tension between his prosecutorial role and our circumstances, we needed to hear this — we needed empathy from the other side.

As the discussion continued, our common ground extended beyond empathy. As Solicitor General, Ian's duty was to advocate for the president, a loyalty echoed in the oaths many of us had to our families, our cultures, and for some veterans in the program, our country. Loyalty, it seemed, was the thread weaving us all together into that room.

Toward the end of our discussion, Ian shared his ability to compartmentalize personal feelings when faced with challenging cases.

We, too, understood the necessity of compartmentalization — it's a crucial skill in navigating relationships within prison. Managing relationships could be the difference between a smooth bid and a rough one.

As the class came to a close, something clicked for me: While our circumstances and upbringings differed, our interests and core values were the same. We all yearned for peace, love, and equality, not for some, but for all.

The meeting might have once symbolized tumult. But that day, it evolved into a conversation that bridged people on both sides of the criminal legal system. We realized there's potential to carve out a space where respect for equality and due process could coexist with empathy and restorative justice.

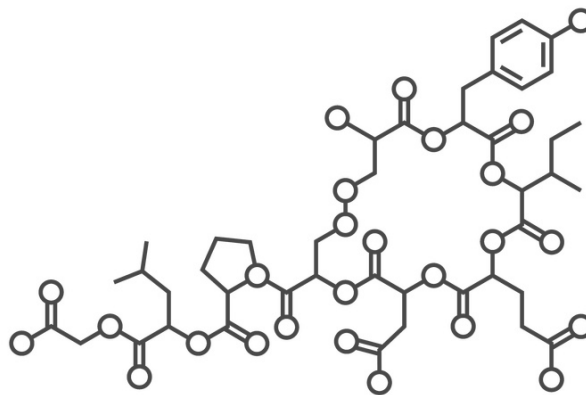
In the past, such an exchange between a prosecutor and 20 incarcerated men might have seemed impossible. Now, as history unfolds, it may tilt its cap in our direction, and we, in turn, will offer a wink and a nod. ▀

OXYTOCIN

By James Hale

[Author's note: "I wrote this poem for a final chemistry presentation, in which I chose to present about chemistry that deals with our emotions: cortisol, adrenaline, oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin. It just so happened at the time I learned about these chemicals, I experienced something that I'd never been to before that forever changed my life: NPEP graduation. It left me motivated to write my first poem."]

Today,
I experienced something that
I have never
in my life
seen before –
A GRADUATION.
Seeing Brothers
walk
across a stage
was exhilarating,
my mind
awash with emotions,
my adrenaline
rushing,
dopamines
coursing through my
veins!
Motivated by
history made before
my eyes,
feelings I'll never let go,
forever seared in
my Amygdala.
My day
is coming.



A hand-drawn pencil is positioned diagonally on the right side of the image, pointing downwards. The background consists of numerous horizontal, wavy lines that resemble a sketch or a textured surface. A purple banner with the word 'POETRY' in white capital letters is centered horizontally across the middle of the image.

POETRY

FAITH / FATE

By Shurese Resé Bailey

Every night, my heart aches
My whole body shakes
I can't understand the charges I'm on
Sometimes I wish I was never born

This crazy world, with its twist of fate
And all along, you find you're the bait
What happened to innocent until proven guilty?
Uh, I forgot
The democracy we live in is filthy!

You've shut down my dreams and hope
And now you expect me to cope
Faith has brought me all this way
Yeah, you're right on that note

God wants me to stay.



I'M RIGHT HERE

By LeShun Smith

Can you see me?
I'm right in your line of sight,
but are you looking at me
or through me?

Maybe you choose to focus on
my veneer of vanity
because the violence you project on me
passively
won't allow you to acknowledge me naturally,
so you choose, rather irrationally,
to cling to the perception you developed
haphazardly.

So I'm asking you—actually—
Who am I?

Do you see my face,
or can you see only my race?

You think the fact that I am in this place
gives credence to the stereotype that I'm
lazy, violent, hypersexual, and a
waste of space
and my being incapacitated deters crime and,
somehow,
makes the public safe.

Are you serious?
Willfully delirious?
But why aren't you curious...

About my marginalization,
my systematic socioeconomic discrimination,
my adverse childhood experiences and
education?

What about my dehumanization,
the constant threat to my liberation
because your love affair with colonization
is perpetuated through my incarceration?



Can you see the person you're facing?

I am the 6'2" inflamed keloidal scar of trauma
that you always seem to overlook.

Is it that if you look into my eyes,
they'll reflect you once hanging me from a tree,
and the guilt of your inhumanity
will drive you to tears?

Or is it that if you fully acknowledge my
humanness,
you'll be incinerated, and the lies you
circulated
will be obliterated,
leaving me most beloved and you most hated,
and you can't take it.

That must be your fear!

You'd rather acknowledge me symbolically,
smile in my face, and give me honorable
mentions and disingenuous apologies,
instead of looking me in my eyes, seeing me
holistically,
and recognizing my story's authenticity,
even though it may not always be clear.

Despite the lies you told
and the legacies you stole,
I've always been
right here!

BUTTERFLY

By Ian Valencia

Beautiful butterfly on my window,
Why do you torment me so?
You stop and please my eye
Then flutter to and fro
Back again with summer's peak
To grab my heart and tug its strings
Then you leave
Taking with you my breath to power your wings.
Where do you go?
Why are you searching?
What is it that you need to know?




I am but a caged bird with half a soul.
Do you want that too?
Why return if I bore you so?
Oh beautiful butterfly on my window
I rant and rave and bite my chains
But please don't go.
Tell me of the world you see
Tell me the meaning of the word "free"
Please my heart and help me but Dream
I'm a bird that's forgotten how to sing.



cucaracha suertuda

Por Miguel Garcia

Hoy una
Cucaracha entró en mi celda
No la pisé
No la maté
Estaba celoso de ella
Puede entrar y salir
A través de estas barras de acero y yo no puedo
La recogí
Y la lancé hacia la libertad




Constantemente en mi mente
La sociedad está ciega
Al dolor del prisionero
Sorda a los gritos de un prisionero
A las luchas que su familia soporta
Muerte/enfermedad/drama
Soledad entre los masivamente encarcelados
Sentenciado a la celda todo el día
Hace que el dolor sea más intenso
No puedo entender
Mi error/diez segundos de vida
Y si.../Y si...
Corriendo por mi cabeza
Un maratón sin fin
¿Puedes por favor hacer que pare?
Y si.../Y si...
Yo fuera una cucaracha
Alivia mi dolor/No me pises
¡Lánzame hacia la libertad!



lucky roach

By Miguel Garcia

Today a
Cockroach entered my cell
I didn't step on it
I didn't kill it
I was jealous of it
He can come in and out
Through these steel bars and I can't
I picked it up
And tossed it to freedom



Constantly on my mind
Society is blind
To a prisoner's pain
Deaf to a prisoner's cries
Struggles his family endures
Death/sickness/drama
Loneliness among the mass incarcerated
Sentenced to the cell all day
Makes the pain more intense
I can't make sense
Of my mistake/ten seconds of life
What if/what if
Running through my head
An endless marathon
Can you please make it stop?
What if/what if
I was a cockroach
Alleviate my pain/Don't step on me
Toss me toward freedom!





**LAW AND
INCARCERATION**

Who Do Truth-in-Sentencing Laws Serve?

By Elbonie Burnside and Margaret DeFrancisco

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 opened the door for each state in the country to adopt the Truth-in-Sentencing (TIS) law in exchange for federal incentives.

TIS required a state to build prisons, maximize bed space, and hold violent offenders in prison for lengthy periods of time — 75%, 85%, or 100% of their prison term depending on the charge for which they are incarcerated. By comparison, prior to the enactment of the TIS law in 1998, violent offenders could serve 50% of their prison sentence, or even as little as 44% if they receive credit for participating in educational and rehabilitative programming.

Illinois is one of 40 states that met the requirement for federal grants that came along with adopting the truth-in-sentence statute. The state currently has 28 prisons and a prison population of nearly 30,000 people.

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 was dubbed one of the greatest pieces of legislation of its time. In particular, the TIS law appealed to society and victims of harm because longer sentences satisfied their desire to feel safe in their communities. In Illinois, supporting the “tough on crime” policy allowed politicians to be re-elected.

However, the effects of TIS have caused more harm than anyone anticipated for multiple reasons, including its direct link to mass incarceration and poverty. Black people are incarcerated at a much higher rate than white people—up to eight times higher.

And lower income communities suffer the most from having a family member incarcerated, especially if the family member is the breadwinner. Long absences puts a financial and economic burden on the family. One study found that mass incarceration increased the U.S. poverty rate by an estimated 20 percent. Another study found that if a father is incarcerated, a family’s probability of being poor increases by 40%.

TIS not only puts more people in prison and for longer, but it is also a roadblock standing in the path of redemption by withholding tools and incentives necessary for a person in prison to rehabilitate and succeed. With so many prisoners serving long sentences, many prisons prioritize giving educational opportunities to those who are being released earlier. Moreover, those who are sentenced under TIS are not incentivized to participate in education because they receive no good-time credits that can speed up their release. By taking away any hope of release and any education or educational incentives, the law takes away all hope.

There is no greater cruelty than taking away hope.

The law also violates the Illinois Constitution, Article 1, Section 11, which states, “All penalties shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and with the objective of restoring the offender to useful citizenship.” Because TIS is drafted to ignore rehabilitation, the law stands in the way of restoring the offender to useful citizenship.

To understand the impact of TIS on both the incarcerated and on society, we have to look no farther than the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP). Northwestern has brought its educational and restorative justice practices inside two prisons in Illinois. Combined, Stateville and Logan Correctional Centers house nearly 100 NPEP students aiming to better themselves through programming and rehabilitation in hopes of being restored to society. Yet the TIS law prevents that goal from happening.

There are nearly 100 NPEP students, and the amount of sentence credit for these students is approximately 49 years. Since the average annual cost for each person in custody is \$54,000, requiring NPEP students under TIS to serve maximum sentences is costing taxpayers almost \$2.5 million dollars.

Are the state's lawmakers serving society by allowing the taxpayers to continue to pay money for people who have paid their retribution and are no longer a threat to the communities?

“ ARE LAWMAKERS SERVING INCARCERATED PEOPLE BY NOT RESTORING THEM TO USEFUL CITIZENSHIP? ”

Although statistics have shown conclusively that higher education reduces recidivism, lawmakers choose to ignore this claim.

Nonetheless, the NPEP students enrolled in an undergraduate degree program continue to fight for liberation through their actions.

And by enforcing the long sentences of these students, instead of allowing reduced sentences based on educational attainment, TIS is costing the citizens of Illinois millions of dollars. Here's how: By the time each NPEP student graduates from Northwestern, they will have earned a bachelor's degree in social science. If it were not for TIS, this education would be worth a reduction of 180 days from their sentence. Yet, under TIS, these students are ineligible for an award of sentence credits because the award would reduce the sentences below 85% or 100%. If it were not for TIS, students could also receive additional sentence credits for job assignments and participation in additional programming.

Are lawmakers serving incarcerated people by not restoring them to useful citizenship? Wouldn't taxpayers' hard-earned money be better spent if allocated to employ police officers and teachers and to repair the state's damaged infrastructure?

Along with shedding light onto this poorly constructed bill, we are writing this to urge Illinoisans to become involved and knowledgeable on how their money is spent. We implore you call your local legislators and ask them to support Senate Bill 2129 and House Bill 3373, the Illinois Earned Reentry Bill, so that all offenders receive the earned sentence credits that they worked diligently to obtain. We also recommend that you visit the websites of Parole Illinois and Families Against Mandatory Minimum and support the actions these organizations are taking to reinstate earned reentry and parole in Illinois. Finally, we ask that you join us in imploring Illinois and the carceral system to truly embrace their constitutional responsibility to rehabilitate rather than merely incarcerate. ■

Demand Elected Officials Take Action!

Reach out to your local lawmakers using the following script.
Include your own experiences to encourage lawmakers to take action on TIS laws.

Dear [Lawmaker's Name],

I am writing to urge your reevaluation of Truth-in-Sentencing (TIS) laws in Illinois. The current system, incentivized by the 1994 Crime Bill, has led to mass incarceration and disproportionately impacted Black communities. TIS not only exacerbates poverty but also obstructs rehabilitation by denying prisoners access to education and incentives for early release. This contradicts the Illinois Constitution's objective of restoring offenders to useful citizenship. I implore you to champion reforms that strike a balance between public safety and rehabilitation, ensuring a fair and just system for all.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]

Updates From The Legislature

Lynn Green, an NPEP graduate and intern with Illinois State Senator Rachel Ventura's office, highlights four pieces of legislation that may affect certain members of our community. **[Note: three of these four pieces of legislation have already gone into effect.]**

House Bill 3779

Sponsors: State Representatives Carol Ammons and Cyril Nichols, and State Senator Rachel Ventura.

Status: Signed into law. Effective January 1, 2024.

What the bill does: This amendment to the Unified Code of Corrections makes the process of entering the workforce more efficient for nonviolent offenders who are eligible for home confinement or other confinement outside a Department of Corrections (D.O.C.) facility. The law requires that the D.O.C. provide your identifying information to a work release facility not fewer than three days prior to your placement at the facility, instead of not fewer than 15 days.

House Bill 3253

Sponsors: State Representatives Curtis J. Tarver, II, Camille Y. Lilly, and Kimberly du Buclet, and State Senators Rachel Ventura, Willie Preston, Javier L. Cervantes, Meg Loughran Cappel, and Laura M. Murphy.

Status: Signed into law. Effective January 1, 2024.

What the bill does: The law protects people with profound intellectual or developmental disabilities from coercive and deceptive tactics during custodial interrogation. It offers this protection by expanding the definition of "protected person" from only minors under the age of 18 to people who have intellectual disabilities. The law now protects more people from the abusive tactics that law enforcement agencies were legally allowed to employ, such as getting those who cannot read or write to sign confessions.

Senate Bill 125

Primary Sponsors: State Senator Rachel Ventura and State Representative Hoan Huynh.

Status: The state Supreme Court has requested that the legislation be delayed because related cases are currently in front of the court.

What the bill does: This bill eliminates the possibility for the smell of cannabis being used as probable cause to search a vehicle. The 4th amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects citizens from unwarranted search and seizure by law enforcement unless law enforcement has probable cause to do so. The smell of cannabis has constituted probable cause. However, this has led to inequitable results as marijuana has been legalized in some states, including Illinois. In addition, research by the ACLU has shown that Black people are arrested for marijuana possession at higher rates than white people.

Senate Bill 422

Sponsors: State Senators Rachel Ventura, Willie Preston, and Christopher Belt, and State Representative Justin Slaughter.

Status: Signed into law. Effective June 9, 2023.

What the bill does: The law requires the state Department of Corrections to digitize all prisoner master files. This law ensures that incarcerated individuals who are waiting to be released and go back into their communities are not waiting for months because Illinois does not have an updated records system.



**FACULTY & TUTOR
SPOTLIGHT**

PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT: MARY PATTILLO

In the fall of 2022, **Professor Mary Pattillo** taught a course for Cohort 1 at Stateville on qualitative research methods, and each student was required to write an interview guide. One student, **Tony Triplett**, wrote a guide to interview Pattillo, to which she happily obliged.

Below are her responses, edited for length and clarity.

When I went to college, I wanted to be a teacher. I was thinking of being a high school teacher. But my university didn't have a teacher training program.

I was doing well in a sociology class and my professor asked if I had thought about getting a Ph.D. in sociology. I had not, but he convinced me. I don't think I really understood what getting a Ph.D. would lead to. It probably wasn't until I entered graduate school that I realized I would become a college professor, which all circled back to wanting to be a teacher anyway. My mother was also a teacher. She taught college but she also taught the advanced math class at my elementary school. She stopped doing that by the time I got to the grades she taught (7th and 8th), but I remember her grading student homework at night. So, I'm sure that got me thinking of being a teacher.

I came to teach at Northwestern because that's who gave me a job. In college teaching, you don't choose where to teach, the schools choose you. I was lucky that Northwestern chose me. The process is that you apply to many jobs and the schools decide who they want to hire. I was very happy because I love Chicago and wanted to be close to my mother in Milwaukee. And at that time, I was engaged and my fiancé wanted to live in Chicago.

Before NPEP, I'd always been in favor of higher education in prisons even though I hadn't taught a class before. Knowing people close to me who have been incarcerated made it clear that there are brilliant people in prison and they deserve to use their brains like anyone else.

The pros of teaching at Stateville are how prepared the students are and how easy it is to spark class discussion. I also like teaching students who have had a lot of life experiences. The con of teaching at Stateville is the fact that at the end of every class, students have to stay and I get to go. That's the tough part. I would say to potential professors that teaching in NPEP is tough but well worth it, mostly because of the eagerness and openness of the students and for the new and sometimes surprising perspectives they bring to the material we teach.

When I first started teaching at Stateville, my class syllabus was the same for Evanston as it was for Stateville. I just stayed mindful of the resources that my Stateville students would have, so I basically designed the course to be just reading texts and discussion. The course was part of the "first-year seminar" curriculum at Evanston, which also worked at Stateville since the incoming cohort was also in the fall of their first year.



Prof. Mary Pattillo gave closing remarks at NPEP's inaugural bachelor's degree ceremony in November 2023. (photo credit: Monika Wnuk)

When I brought the Evanston students to Stateville for a joint class, I had to make sure all the Evanston students followed the rules of not bringing in things that were prohibited, that they dressed appropriately, and that they brought their IDs. One student was a football player and thought he wouldn't be able to get out of practice, but he made it work. I actually think he was the most impacted by the visit (he wrote me a letter when he was a senior about that visit).

What I'm most glad about is that I had a good plan for the class, including a number of icebreaker activities and then a discussion of a very good book, *Ghosts in the Schoolyard*. I really remember the two icebreakers.

One was, "What did you have for breakfast this morning?" The Stateville students talked about how early breakfast was and what they dreamed about eating. And that the Evanston students had pretty much grabbed whatever they could. And then the other was, "What was some historical event or music in the year you were born?"

This really played up the age differences between the two cohorts. The Evanston students were the ages of some of the Stateville students' kids. But it was a lot of fun.

Then we discussed the book. What I remember most is the Evanston students being quiet again and Cohort 1 Student Craig Harvey saying, "Okay, you all are going to have to step up — we can't carry the class!" I was so glad that I didn't have to say that but that a fellow student said it. It all felt really good. The Stateville students were really welcoming and helped the Evanston students come out of their shells.

I teach at Stateville for a lot of reasons but also because the Bible tells me to. It's something I told your class in 2019 and I still find it true today.

I am actually not a very religious person. I was raised Catholic and I believe in God. But I'm open to God in all kinds of manifestations and through various religions.

And there are some basic lessons in the Bible that strike me as aligning with the Goodness of God.

In Matthew 25, for instance, we learn what Goodness can look like:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

"The con of teaching at Stateville is the fact that at the end of every class, students have to stay and I get to go. That's the tough part."



NPEP graduate Tony Triplett was a participating member of NPEP's inaugural bachelor's degree ceremony. (photo credit: Monika Wnuk)

Whenever I tell someone I'm teaching at Stateville, they always say something like how great it is that I'm doing it and how lucky the students are that I'm doing it. In fact, just the other day someone wrote me, "Thank you for the amazing things that you do for others, you are truly a blessing to many!"

I appreciate these comments, don't get me wrong. But I think it's important for you students to know that I have some selfish motives. You all are some of the best students ever and if I want to practice my vocation, then this is one of the best places to do it. ■

Mary Pattillo is the Harold Washington Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Department of Black Studies at Northwestern University.

TUTOR SPOTLIGHT: SANJANA SUBRAMANIAM

By Regina DeFrancisco



It was a fortuitous set of circumstances that brought Northwestern graduate student Sanjana Subramaniam to the Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) and specifically to work with the women at Logan Correctional Center.

Sanjana joined NPEP in 2019, when the program was only offered at Stateville Correctional Center, a men's prison. Unfortunately, this year was also the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted normal interactions outside school staff within the prison environment. These constraints did not deter the NPEP founders like Sanjana from expanding the program to make the prestige of a Northwestern education accessible to the incarcerated women at Logan in 2020. She was drawn to this new opportunity, and felt that as a marginalized woman in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), other women, even those in prison, could relate to overcoming educational obstacles while finding a place of belonging within academics.

Sanjana is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering. Her research focuses on the physics of a manufacturing process called electrospinning, an electrically driven 3D printing method that can precisely pattern sub-micron structures.

Her work will improve this process's productivity and efficiency for biomedical, energy, and filtration applications. Not only is she an engineer, but she is also a recipient of the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program, the Mechanical Engineering Graduate Diversity and Service Award, and the Ryan Fellowship. In addition, Sanjana is a phenomenal artist and is multilingual. She is a Renaissance woman and an inspiring role model. Thankfully, her genius has been extended to us as well.

The ladies at Logan had never dreamed of the opportunity to earn our bachelor's degree at one of the nation's top institutions; many eagerly filled out applications for this life-changing chance.

We first met Sanjana during the interview process over Zoom and were struck by her non-judgmental, inviting, and humble personality. Then we met her at the in-person interviews and these qualities shined even brighter. Sanjana's energy was inspirational, yet she was personable; her desire to get to know us and to meet our educational needs was evident.

Her role at NPEP is integral to our success. Sanjana established and continues to run a tutoring program, in which she partners two students on Northwestern's Evanston/Chicago campus with each incarcerated NPEP student at Logan to provide individualized academic support and guidance. She also works with NPEP staff to set up the tutoring schedule, vet student tutors, and handle mounds of paperwork with ease. We can always count on Sanjana to go the extra mile for us.

Her dedication to NPEP is thoroughly displayed with every three-hour drive (both ways!) to visit Logan Correctional Center, which is in Lincoln, a town in southern Illinois. A few quarters ago, our cohort needed some extra attention for our chemistry class. Sanjana, who has an undergraduate degree in chemistry as well as engineering, drove down to Lincoln with two other volunteers, Madisen and Kat, and tutored us until 8 p.m. They slept at a nearby motel and came back the next day so that Sanjana could teach us some more. Our cohort passed that class and we could not have done it without Sanjana's knowledge, loyalty, and patience.

Sanjana also makes frequent trips to Logan for ongoing forms of support. For example, she provided each of the 19 students at Logan guidance, feedback, and counsel on our Northwestern undergraduate applications. Her honest and expert critique ensures that we put forth the best work possible. Moreover, she never hesitates to run an impromptu tutoring session for any number of classes, including astronomy, statistics, or computational thinking. There is yet to be a class that Sanjana cannot tackle. Additionally, Sanjana provides re-entry support to our peers that are released from prison to continue their studies.

Given our circumstances, her achievements would seem unattainable for NPEP students, yet Sanjana makes us feel like we are her equals. She encourages and assures us that we absolutely have all that it takes to go as far as we desire. Still my own words cannot do her justice.

Her true altruism, fire, and conviction are illuminated in the following interview. When I asked what interested her in NPEP and prison education, Sanjana replied with no hesitation:

"As a teenager, I read a quote from Fyodor Dostoyevsky that said that you can judge a society by how it treats its prisoners. As someone who didn't know much about the topic, I looked more into the conditions in prisons and learned about mass incarceration in this country. It was then that I discovered prison education and the numerous benefits it holds for breaking down barriers and reducing recidivism. I am incredibly lucky to have the level of education I do have, and I think that everyone should have the opportunity to learn and grow in this way. I see it as a personal responsibility to give back and help others in this way, especially since education is in such dire need."

She further expressed that our cohort's engagement and appreciation for an education made her even more enthusiastic to work with us and solidified that her involvement with NPEP was a wise decision. Sanjana remarked how working with the NPEP students has helped her self-development immensely:

"This program has given me the opportunity to develop soft skills such as empathy, emotional intelligence, leadership, and self-awareness. In a scientific laboratory setting, these attributes can go underdeveloped. In my opinion, it is very important to be able to communicate effectively with people of all different skill sets and backgrounds to be a better scientist and human being. Overall, I think that my involvement with NPEP has taught me the value of building community and using my experiences to help others grow as well. I honestly could not have expected the amount of personal development and growth I have gained because of it."

“ Overall, I think that my involvement with NPEP has taught me the value of building community and using my experiences to help others grow as well. I honestly could not have expected the amount of personal development and growth I have gained because of it. ”

— Sanjana Subramaniam

Sanjana humbly embodies the notion that when you give, you also receive, often in unexpected ways. When I inquired about what she valued the most from the NPEP experience, she insightfully responded:

"I value the amount of work it takes to make an impact. Just saying you care is not enough. It takes time and effort to affect change. While change can come from conversations and shifting ideas, it requires active engagement to create a more just world."

This demonstrates the fire and conviction I spoke of earlier, while also distinctly illustrating why Sanjana Subramaniam is central to the success of NPEP's Logan cohort.

In closing, when someone invests as much in others because they truly believe that they are worth it, it is inspiring beyond words. So, thank you Sanjana for believing in us and always being there for us. It is a privilege to share space with you. ■

AN OPEN LETTER TO A HERO, JENNIFER LACKEY:

I've seen my fair share of heroes.

Some of them wear capes. Most of them do not. What they all share in common, though, is this: no matter how battered, bruised, broken, tired, and emotionally crippled by various disappointments they experience, they continue to try to save humanity.

Heroes carry on because they have made a promise to others that they will give it their all and they won't let others down. They give hope.

Heroes fight for no personal gain. They are selfless. They choose to fight on unlikely battlefields against seemingly unbeatable opponents.

For these reasons, Professor Jennifer Lackey, you are, without a doubt, a hero.

You've seen the world and the things you want to change about it. Injustice, inequality, and hatred disturbed you. I believe that, most of all, you were angered by the lack of respect and sensitivity to people in prison. To me, you felt you needed to speak out and take action to make change happen.

Most importantly, you knew that real change comes from inside!



*NPEP graduate D.C. Crite embraces Prof. Jennifer Lackey at NPEP's inaugural bachelor's degree ceremony.
(photo credit: Monika Wnuk)*

Many people go through their lives without a real sense of purpose. Not you — you have a mission, and you believe in it with total passion.

For those who have felt undeserving of being saved, you've stood up and defended them. You've been wounded, but you persevere and fight on. I've seen others quit for far less.

Although you've been through the fire, you manage to keep your head up. For your sacrifices, others notice and respect you. But you know the fight isn't over. It never will be.

I believe you chose this battle because you wanted to mentor other heroes in this world. Though you came into this knowing that even the best-laid plans and strategies might fail, you would still win for us. Take solace! Your continued fight makes you a proven winner. Every day, you teach me and others how to win.

Please continue to be a hero, an example of how to stand tall, how to fly even when your cape has holes, and to be steadfast in moments of uncertainty.

Though it may seem like it's a constant struggle, let me reassure you: heroes never lose. ▀

— D.C. Crite



**OUR
COMMUNITY**



MAKING HISTORY

16 Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP) students become the first incarcerated students to graduate from a top 10 university

By Donnell Green

On Nov. 15, 2023, 16 NPEP students made history as the first incarcerated students in the country to be conferred a bachelor's degree from a top 10 university.

The ceremony was held at the theater at Stateville Correctional Center, where wide smiles, camera crews, and Kleenex were out in full force.

Before the ceremony began, there was limited room as graduating students made their rounds to embrace their friends, family, and loved ones.

Members of the media, invited to witness and report on this special day, set up behind the audience and were very casual in their interactions with students. CBS Chicago's Noel Brennan invited people behind the lens as he set up for what he called an "amazing event." Alex Perez of ABC News stood astonished by one of the "biggest" ceremonies he's covered. He admitted that this commencement felt different, as he candidly shared that he had two brothers who fell into the clutches of prison. "This [graduation] gives people a sense that not all doors are closed," he said.

Before the ceremony began, NPEP Graduate Michael Broadway reunited with his mother for the first time in nearly 20 years, thanks to Warden Charles Truitt expeditiously granting Ms. Broadway clearance inside. There wasn't a dry eye in the section.

As the ceremony began, faculty from Northwestern University floated gracefully from the balcony in beautiful academic regalia, shaking hands and hugging their students in the crowd as they made their way up to the stage.

Illinois Department of Corrections's Acting Director Latoya Hughes welcomed those in attendance with a message that spoke to the graduating students' perseverance.

"Your success bears testament to the transformative power of education and demonstrates that this is an investment worth making," Hughes said. "As you join the ranks of the same college graduates who came before you, I hope that this milestone is only one of many of the investments you make in yourself, your families, and your communities."

Northwestern University Provost Kathleen Hagerty conferred the diplomas to graduates later in the ceremony, but first took to the podium to speak about their achievement in the face of adversity.

"At Northwestern, we believe in transformation," Hagerty said to the graduating class. "In fact, one of our guiding principles is 'We transform society.' And that's not an easy thing to do. All of our graduates here today can attest to the hard work it takes to make a positive change. I congratulate and commend all our graduates for harnessing the power of education to make positive changes in your lives and to be able to share what you've learned with your communities."

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker also addressed students through a pre-recorded video message to the graduates, congratulating the class for defying the "assumption and stereotypes that have been heaped upon you."

Gov. Pritzker is a 1993 graduate of Northwestern's law school, now called Pritzker School of Law.



(photo to credit: Monika Wnuk)



Lt. Governor Julia Stratton gave an impassioned speech, beginning her speech with a brief assurance to the graduates: “I see you.”

“This graduation is a significant step forward for higher education within the criminal legal system and we must do more. All people, regardless of their circumstances, deserve access to education and to realize their full potential,” Stratton said. “The Northwestern Prison Education Program is a testament to how the power of education can truly transform lives and provide hope for a better future, both within and outside prison walls.”

When NPEP Director Jennifer Lackey was given the podium to say her remarks, the entire NPEP community rose to their feet. She was applauded and given huge shout-outs.

Lackey did her best to hold back tears as she got through her remarks. Her message was clear, though: she remained steadfast in her pursuit to show the transformative power of education.

“It is often said that education is transformative, and I believe this even more wholeheartedly with each passing day in our community,” Lackey said. “But I have also been powerfully moved by the way you all have transformed education. You have radically expanded what it means to be a Northwestern student. You have enriched Northwestern University in ways that will echo for decades to come.”

Following Lackey’s impassioned remarks, Ta-Nehisi Coates, award-winning journalist and author of several bestselling books, stood before the graduates.

He gave a powerful speech, which was more impressive considering that the speech he prepared was on his iPad, which was not allowed inside Stateville (unless previously cleared, electronic devices are not allowed within Stateville).

Coates said that though his journey with education has been “troubled,” he felt compelled to speak at NPEP’s graduation.

“When I got the invitation to come here to address you, wild horses couldn’t stop me because I’m addressing myself,” Coates said. “I don’t know you, but I know you. I don’t know you, but I love you.”

Said Coates: “I think I can safely say that I will never in my life address a class that’s as decorated as this.”

As a self-proclaimed bad speller in his youth, Coates said he struggled to come to terms with the notion that his underdevelopment in language could result in him being dead or in jail. At age 14, Coates said he was arrested for assaulting a teacher but, due to parental intervention, the case did not proceed. He feels he made it by luck.

Though the graduates succeeded by walking across the stage that day, Coates said that society had ultimately failed them.

When the graduates finally took the stage, NPEP students had tears rolling down their cheeks as they listened to how Michael Broadway beat cancer while pursuing a degree; how Malik Muhammed thanked the governor for saving his life; and how Benard McKinley reversed his 100-year sentence and became the first person in Illinois history to take the LSAT while in custody.

Each student was then conferred their diploma — making history from inside Stateville.

Following the ceremony, many of the attendees lost their sense of being in a prison setting; in prison, it’s rare to see children galloping around with cookies in hand as hip-hop plays through loud speakers.

“This is the first time I smiled in two weeks,” said NPEP student Pierre Cole.

The smell of cheese pizza and sweet melon kept the serving lines occupied as everyone took advantage to have their fill.

At one point, some students attempted to persuade Jennifer Lackey to Cha-Cha Slide (she didn’t, unfortunately). Gerpha Gerlin, a member of the NPEP Wellness Team, smiled at the scene. She wished she could “put this moment in a box.”

Reality set in during the mid-afternoon, confirming that this experience — inside a prison — was a bubble. As students were paraded out of the ceremony, a tactical team officer was asked to rate the experience. He gushed smugly as if he had been waiting for this question. “Zero,” he said. “This was a waste of time.”

There is a saying that old habits die hard, but the truth is that some people are afraid of change; it’s easier for them to believe that others can’t change for them to justify their stagnation. But no amount of badge-flexing can surmount what these graduates achieved.

Some studied for class while bodies draped in white sheets lay outside their cells during the worst of the pandemic. Others continued their studies while dealing with the daily grind of prison life.

The graduates persevered against unenviable obstacles but they came out on the other end to make history against the backdrop of a tomorrow that was never promised. ▫

AT LONG LAST ...

FREEDOM.

After more than four decades, NPEP graduate James Soto was released on December 14 from Stateville Correctional Center.

James and his cousin, David Ayala, were fully exonerated from crimes they did not commit.

After getting settled, James plans on attending law school and working at a law firm. "I want to be able to be that lawyer that could help people just like me," Soto told reporters when he was released.



(Photo credit: Kerika Brown)



Photo credit: Monika Wroble

Not even a month prior, James was one of 16 NPEP students who was conferred a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University.

“It is a recognition of all of the hard work of Cohort 1 — we put in countless hours and even pushed ourselves through a worldwide pandemic to reach this pinnacle,” James said at the ceremony. ▫



A JOURNEY TO JUSTICE

*Pondering 42 Years in
Prison with James Soto*

By Anthony Ehlers



On December 14, 2023, NPEP graduate James Soto walked out of Stateville Correctional Center in Crest Hill, Illinois, concluding a 42-year struggle to prove his innocence. A Cook County Judge exonerated Soto and his cousin, David Ayala, marking the end of Soto and Ayala's tenure as the longest-serving wrongfully convicted prisoners in Illinois history.

In 1981, Soto and Ayala were convicted of a double murder despite the absence of eyewitnesses or physical evidence linking them to the crime. Soto's attorney's neglect paved the way for a swift conviction, leaving Soto grappling with the injustice of a crime he did not commit.

"No one would listen," Soto recalled. "I was telling everyone I could that I was innocent, but no one wanted to listen."

Wrongful convictions are pervasive. Estimates for wrongful convictions range from 0.027% to 15%, underscoring flaws in the justice system's procedures. Even if the more conservative estimates are accepted, that translates to thousands of innocent people who are still locked up.

In Illinois, the outlook is even more grim. Over the past decade, more than two-thirds of exonerations in Illinois involved murder convictions, almost twice the national average. And the number of Black people in the state who were wrongfully arrested and convicted sits at 77% — a rate that trumps the national average by more than 20%.

Soto leaves Stateville an innocent and humble man of integrity and principle, qualities that would be difficult to find in any man, let alone someone who has spent the last 42 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit.

Before his release, I spoke with him to reflect on his journey.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Anthony: Take me back to your trial more than four decades ago. How do you view that time as someone who is now a legal advocate?

James: I had never been on trial for anything before. I was so young that I had no idea what was going on. A lawyer has to have a college degree, and they have to go through years of training and studying to pass the bar exam to become a lawyer. But the court expects you to know just as much, if not more, than your lawyer. You have to hold them accountable. You're responsible for what your lawyer does. The court doesn't hold your lawyer responsible for errors or inadequacies — they hold you responsible. How is any kid off the street supposed to know more than their lawyer? The system is set up for you to fail.

Anthony: To me, the system runs like an assembly line at a factory. A conviction is put together and run at the trial level before it travels up the assembly line. Judges and prosecutors check the levers and switches at various stations before they put it in a box, put a lid on it, and place it on the shelf. But by this time it's gone for good, and it's dispatched to nothing more than case law.

James: People like to say that the system is broken, but the truth of the matter is the system runs just like it's supposed to. Those at the top keep those at the bottom from moving up in ways that are all dressed up in stiff and sterile legal language.

This cannot become the norm. It cannot become an accepted part of the process for innocent men and women to languish in prison forever for a crime they did not commit, only to be set free decades later after their lives have passed them by — their children have grown up without a mother or a father or their loved ones have died. It's unacceptable that Illinois is the worst in the nation when it comes to police misconduct and wrongful convictions.

Anthony: Why do you think this problem continues to plague the people of Illinois?

James: Honestly, it comes down to a lack of political will. That's the major impediment we hear a lot about in criminal justice reform, but nothing ever gets done. These politicians play three-card monte with their words. They offer lip service to the idea of change because they know it's what people want, but then they make political calculations — as they do all too often — but those calculations don't add up to change. They won't change the procedures to help because they have a fear of guilty defendants convicted of violent offenses exploiting procedural loopholes to get out of prison. This all comes back to how this may affect [politicians] in their bid for reelection. It's political gutlessness.

Anthony: While incarcerated, you took education seriously. You took vocational courses, received college credits, and became a Jaycee (a member of the United States Junior Chamber). You taught business accounting and entrepreneurial courage, tutored Spanish-speaking prisoners, and eventually, began working in the law library, which led to you becoming a paralegal. Why did education take such precedence for you?

James: On my third day in prison, we went to the movie hall to watch a film. I saw a guy get stabbed. He lay in the aisle and bled to death. The CO (correctional officer) didn't notice until the movie was over. I saw right away what a highly aggressive and violent place prison can be. I had to learn how to navigate that.

I've always held education in high esteem. It was instilled in me as a child that to have a level playing field in society, I needed a good education. As a Mexican-American, people would look down on me, as if I were stupid. Education was something that no one could take away from me.

When I was in my junior year at Quigley South Preparatory Seminary School, we had a college recruitment day. I remember this senior from Notre Dame in this gold jacket, handing out gold pamphlets. I knew then that I really wanted to go to college.

And I did, with the Northwestern Prison Education Program. Professor Jennifer Lackey's vision of higher education for men and women in prison was amazing. I was being taught the same courses that are taught on campus. In prison, they take away so much, but this program gives you back a sense of being a person. I have forged lasting relationships with individuals I never would have otherwise met. This is the vision of community that Jennifer Lackey tried to build for us.

Anthony: As a legal advocate, you helped get 14 new trials, two exonerations, and more than 100 re-sentencings. In total, you say you've worked nearly 1,000 cases. All of this time, you were helping fellow prisoners get the results they sought before legal counsel could get it for you.

James: I felt like I was in a unique position to help, to know what it is like to be wrongfully convicted and stuck in this hell hole with no help and no one listening to you. I didn't want anyone else to feel that way.

It also helped me grow and learn as a legal advocate. Here I was, in prison, winning cases and helping to get others home. It was a great feeling — these things helped me grow in ways that are hard to define. I've become less critical and learned that power isn't always equated with money. There is power in knowledge and words, and I have tried to teach that to others.

Anthony: You took the LSAT and did great. How was that?

James: You know me, I don't like to brag but it was good. I was nervous but I did well.

I want to go to law school. You don't need a law license to help somebody. I've done it my whole time in prison, but I want to pass the bar. There are other innocent men and women in prison — we know some of them.

Even those who aren't innocent need help. People who have death-by-incarceration sentencing who no longer need to be in prison — somebody who has been in prison for years and years and who has changed and is rehabilitated and not a danger to society any longer — you're just wasting taxpayer money and robbing society of someone who will be a productive strong addition. How can we expect other people to do better if we as a society don't do better?

Anthony: We've talked about some of the problems with the criminal justice system. What, in your opinion, can be done to help fix things?

James: Great question. You have to tweak some things like the appellate procedures so people are allowed to put forth innocence claims, even in the post-conviction process. You have to make things easier for prisoners' pleas of innocence to be heard. But it goes further than that.

You have to encourage the election of progressive prosecutors like Kim Foxx and add more conviction integrity units. You also have to establish innocence commissions to get into wrongful convictions. In a state like Illinois with the corruption and manufacturing of evidence, more leeway should be given to a prisoner claiming innocence, not less. I'd also like to point out that clemency and parole are only as good as the officials in charge. We need to make sure we have the right people in those positions.

Anthony: What's next for you?

James: Spending time with my family, getting my certificate of innocence, and going to law school. ▀

LIFE ON THE OUTSIDE

A year and a half following his release from Stateville Correctional Center, Broderick Hollins sat down with NPEP intern Darya Tadlaoui to talk about when he first heard about NPEP, the day he got out, and the challenges he's faced in the outside world.

Below are his responses, edited for length and clarity.



(photo credit: Monika Winiuk)

On getting out

When I first heard about NPEP, I was in “seg” — solitary confinement — at Danville Correctional Center. One of the wardens came by and gave me an application to fill out because she knew I had a bigger purpose than what I was locked up for in seg. She told me to fill it out, and I filled it out. And then I got in.

I didn't know I was going to be released while I was still an NPEP student. Eventually, I knew I had an out date, and I knew that with NPEP I received some good time credit. But I didn't have a clue that I was getting out during the process, so I was just doing what I was supposed to do to get the grades so I could get some good time.

It was January 10, 2022. They were doing count like a regular day, and they said, “Hollins, pack it up, you're leaving.” I asked the guard where I was going and they said, “Home.” I didn't find that funny, and I thought he was playing. I told him to go get his boss and he came back laughing and said, “Yeah, boy, you're going home.” I didn't have time to plan or do anything because everything just happened at that moment. They asked me, “Man, you wanna make a call?” So, I called my mother.

“Mom, I'm on my way home,” I said.

“Boy, stop playing,” she said.

“No, I'm serious.”

“Well, if you serious, I'm gonna send a ride.”

My little sister, Brittany, came to pick me up. When I walked out, I just stood there like, “Damn, this really just happened.” I stood in the middle of the parking lot and I looked around and I just heard Brittany call my name and she ran and just jumped in my arms crying, and we just hugged for like three minutes.

On the way home, we stopped at a mall. I had a panic attack because there were too many people moving, birds flying, cars coming and I was like, “Yeah, this is way too much.” For over a decade, I walked the same way, I moved the same way.

I hadn't told my kids I was coming home. When my daughter, Briasha, walked into the house, she was talking to my mother, her grandmother, and I just walked around the corner. She turned her head and saw me right there. She was frozen for a nice long minute, and she just walked to me, crying.

Then my son came home and was looking around like, “Why is everybody here on Monday?” So, I walked out, and he just stared at me and we hugged.

My baby, Jada, had to use the bathroom when she got home, so she just ran straight to it, even though I was waiting right by the door. When she came out, she just stopped and looked at me and she cried and came into my arms. My oldest daughter, Amiah, came over with her mother.

That day was special because my grandmother was there, was alive, and we hugged for at least 10 minutes, just standing there. She was praying and telling me she knew I was going to make it and all that good stuff. That was a Kodak moment. That was the picture that we used for her obituary, me hugging her.

On the NPEP community

I've stayed in NPEP on the outside because of the company that comes with it. When you have people around you, they keep you level-headed to an extent. I got good energy around me that's needed because out here's rougher than in there.

And then there's the people I've met. Before NPEP, I never had people I could just trust or didn't want to just use me for what I could do in the streets. Through NPEP, I met Annie Buth, who became like my sister, and she's been the one helping me with parole and finding employment.

I ended up going to San Francisco with her for a restorative justice conference. That was the freest I ever felt because I was able to just walk. I'd never done that. Just walk and sit on the beach by the bay in San Francisco and just not care about nothing. That was my first time ever feeling free.

On overcoming setbacks

After I got my associate's degree in 2022, I found out my high school diploma wasn't up to par. That was the biggest slap in the face — that I had to start over. At one point, I was kind of like, "Man, I'm done. I'm not gonna step backwards."

But so many people in NPEP were like, "Man, you know we got you and you came this far, so this is just another obstacle you got to cross."

They just let me pout for a couple of days and then were like, "You ready now?" I needed that.

On making an impact

When Maria Garza called me earlier [in 2023], she told me she got the NPEP Justice Fellowship. I said, "Guess what? I got it, too."

That was amazing because of where we come from, a maximum prison, to be here, doing this? That was a big boost.

Then there's Javier, who we call Javy, who's like a brother now. And then there's Oscar, we call him Smiley. I was locked up with him. And Heather, too. I think the Justice Fellows are gonna bring powerful change because we've all felt the pain and know the pain and we could help prevent the pain.

On staying the course with NPEP

Future NPEP students: This will be the best thing you will ever experience during your incarceration. It's a fraternity, and I'm still part of it. Every last one of those guys, they know that I'm NPEP and I'm there for them. If I can help, I'm gonna help.

Take this seriously. There are some real genuine people who care about you in this program. The stuff that they've done for me since I've been out is way more than what I could have imagined — it's like a family here.

If you're just locked up, you better read up on NPEP. Try to get involved. Even if you don't make the first cut, try again. If you don't make the second cut, try again. Eventually, they're gonna keep seeing your name and say, "Yeah, let's give this man his chance and see what he can do." ■



Broderick Hollins stands at The Arch, the entrance to Northwestern's Evanston campus.

INFO, LETTERS, & UPDATES

TO AND FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Hispanohablantes: ¿sobre qué quieren leer en números futuros de Northwestern Insider?

Saludos mi gente,

Gusto en saludarlos. Este mensaje es de parte de Miguelangel y Hugo de la comunidad de NPEP, un programa de educacion en prision de la universidad de Northwestern. En las ultimas semanas se ha estado creando una revista academica y informativa que sera vista a travez de la tableta de G+L y tambien copias en papel. Nuestra mision y objetivo es poder alcanzarlos y incluirlos en nuestra comunidad. Poco a poco empezaremos a interpretar en español articulos que nuestros compañeros han preparado para ustedes, pero esta revista tambien es de ustedes y nos gustaria saber que les interesa saber, aprender, compartir, entender y mantenerte informado. Esta revista es inclusiva y tambien para la comunidad de mujeres encarceladas.

- ¿Cual es la mayor batalla que enfrentas donde queira que te encuentres?
- ¿Como enfrentas estas batallas? O como las resuelves?
- ¿Que te hubiera saber, aprender, entender o mantenerte informado?

— Estudiantes NPEP Miguel Garcia y Hugo Ocon

NPEP Justice Fellows receive nonprofit grants

NPEP Justice Fellows Maria Garza and Javier Reyes recently received two federal grants for their nonprofit, Challenge II Change.

A grant from the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) Housing for Justice-Involved Individuals (HJIIP) “gave us money to purchase and rehab property for housing individuals recently released from prison or county jail and or individuals who are having housing hardships due to past prison/county time,” Garza said.

The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Reimagine Public Safety Grant gives Challenge II Change the ability to find offices, hire staff, and continue providing supportive services to those who are at the highest risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of violence, especially gun violence.

“We can also support individuals who have been recently released or previously released who, by not having supportive services, are at risk of committing crimes,” Garza said.

Through these grants, Challenge II Change was able to hire Darryl Johnson, an NPEP student who was released earlier this year.

NPEP students released, plan to continue pursuing degrees

In 2023, NPEP students James Soto, Jacob Currey, Brandon Perkins, and Darryl Johnson were released, joining previously released students Broderick Hollins, Maria Garza, and James Lenoir. They plan on continuing with NPEP as they navigate life on the outside.

“It is with tremendous excitement that I can say I have been released!” Currey said. “I look forward to continuing the program and doing everything I can to advocate for my fellow classmates still incarcerated.”

NPEP Student Joel Davis featured in play showcase

In November, Joel “Yoel” Davis, an NPEP student, premiered his play, “In Search of a Better Place,” at the Play On! Student Playwright Festival and Competition at Oakton College.

Students from community colleges in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin were invited to submit a script of a one-act play or storytelling monologue in any genre or style. Four Oakton theater students and two Oakton theater alumni directed an ensemble of seventeen performers for the festival.

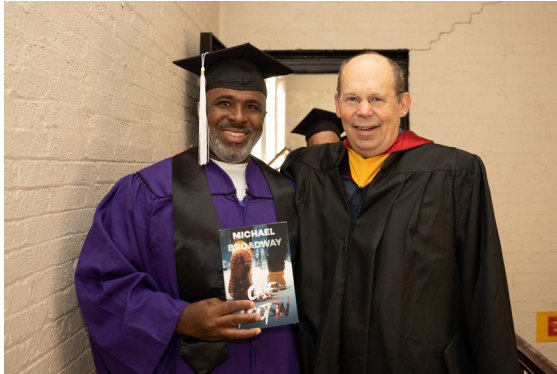
“In Search of a Better Place” is a one-act play that explores systemic racism through a fictional debate between well-known Black activists and historians, weaving quotations from their writings as dialogue in the play. Historical characters include Bobby E. Wright, John Franklin, Alfred A. Moss, Dr. Frances Cress Welsing, and William Cooper.

NPEP Student Michael Broadway publishes debut novel

In between battling stage four prostate cancer, completing his coursework for NPEP, and navigating life at Stateville, Michael Broadway still found the time to write and publish a book.

His debut, *One Foot In*, is a coming-of-age story about two best friends, Frank and Dupree, trying to navigate the gritty streets of Chicago.

Broadway is working on his second book, a sequel to his debut novel. *One Foot In* can be purchased on Amazon.



Michael Broadway with his book, *One Foot In*, and Medill Professor Alex Kotlowitz. (photo credit: Monika Wnuk)

Stateville & Logan students host holiday parties

During the month of December, several holiday celebrations were held for NPEP students.

On December 4, NPEP staff, tutors, and faculty visited Logan students to ring in the holiday season. Students enjoyed a holiday spread, watched news coverage of the Stateville graduation, and talked about their upcoming courses, milestones, and eventual graduation.

And on December 11, a holiday party for Stateville students was held inside the facility's theater.

Cohort 3 student Donnell Green was at the Stateville party:

Over 100 people gathered to celebrate the holiday season at Stateville. NPEP graduate Tony Triplett deejayed the event, which encouraged people to get out of their seats and dance. Cohort 4 student Jabari Nicks even did the Cha-Cha Slide.

There was a DIY cookie station, where students created scenes of the holidays for winner of a cookie-making contest. Ian Valencia, of Cohort 4, and Jason Gorham, of Cohort 3, battled for best display. There was much debate about who came in first.

Holidays are tough for individuals in custody, as their need for family connection grows. Separation is more evident. "Being here feels good," said Cohort 2 student Todd Mandoline. "We're usually in a cell all day, so having people to come in here who care about us, we need that."

"It was highly important for me to get everyone here and party with you guys," said NPEP Deputy Director Michelle Paulsen. "We're a community and that's what communities do — they're there for each other in times of hardship and in celebration."

Women's Justice Institute holds event featuring NPEP students

On October 30, over 50 domestic violence survivors from inside Logan Correctional Center shared their stories through performance and dance for *Look at Me 2023: A Dark Butterfly's Shattered Silence*.

Several NPEP students participated.

Erika Ray, Stephanie Bonds, and Vanecha Cooper recited a poem together on the voices of the womenfolk. Additionally, Vanecha performed a singing duet, and Stephanie danced in a synchronized routine.

Margaret DeFrancisco recited a personal essay on surviving domestic abuse.

Joyce McGee performed a poem on the definition of justice. Joyce also performed as a dancer alongside Shawnette Green, who sang a song on freedom.

In the event's art competition, Patty Ouska won third place for her piece, "Hurt People Hurt People." She also recited a poem she wrote.

Based in Chicago, the Women's Justice Institute works to end women's mass incarceration, to reduce harm to impacted women (and gender expansive individuals), their children and families, and to improve health, well-being, and outcomes among them.

NPEP Restorative Justice Fellow holds program's first community panel

On Nov. 2, NPEP hosted a panel "Community Response to Reentry and Recidivism" on Northwestern's Evanston campus.

Oscar Parham, an NPEP Justice Fellow, was the moderator of the panel, which included a Northwestern professor, reentry organizers, and people who were previously incarcerated.

Northwestern Insider

Submission Guidelines

Eligibility

- Submissions are open to students currently enrolled in NPEP.
- All genres of written work and forms of art are welcome, including but not limited to poetry, short stories, essays, and visual art.

Content Guidelines

- Submissions should be original and created by the submitting artist or writer.
- We encourage a wide range of themes and topics, including personal narratives, reflections, social issues, fiction, non-fiction, 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

- Please do not submit more than two (2) pieces per issue.
- Writing submissions can be handwritten or typed.
- At the top of every submission, the following **MUST** be included:
 - Your name
 - The date you submit for consideration
 - A title of submission
 - A brief summary/description of the submission
 - The label “**PLEASE GIVE TO:** *Northwestern Insider* Support Staff” at the top of the page
- 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.

Upcoming Deadlines

- **February 9, 2024:** Any and all submissions for consideration for Issue Two must be submitted. Authors will receive feedback, edits, or requests for revisions as soon as possible. Any submission submitted after this date will be considered for Issue Three.

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

Looking back..



(photo credit: Monika Wmua)



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