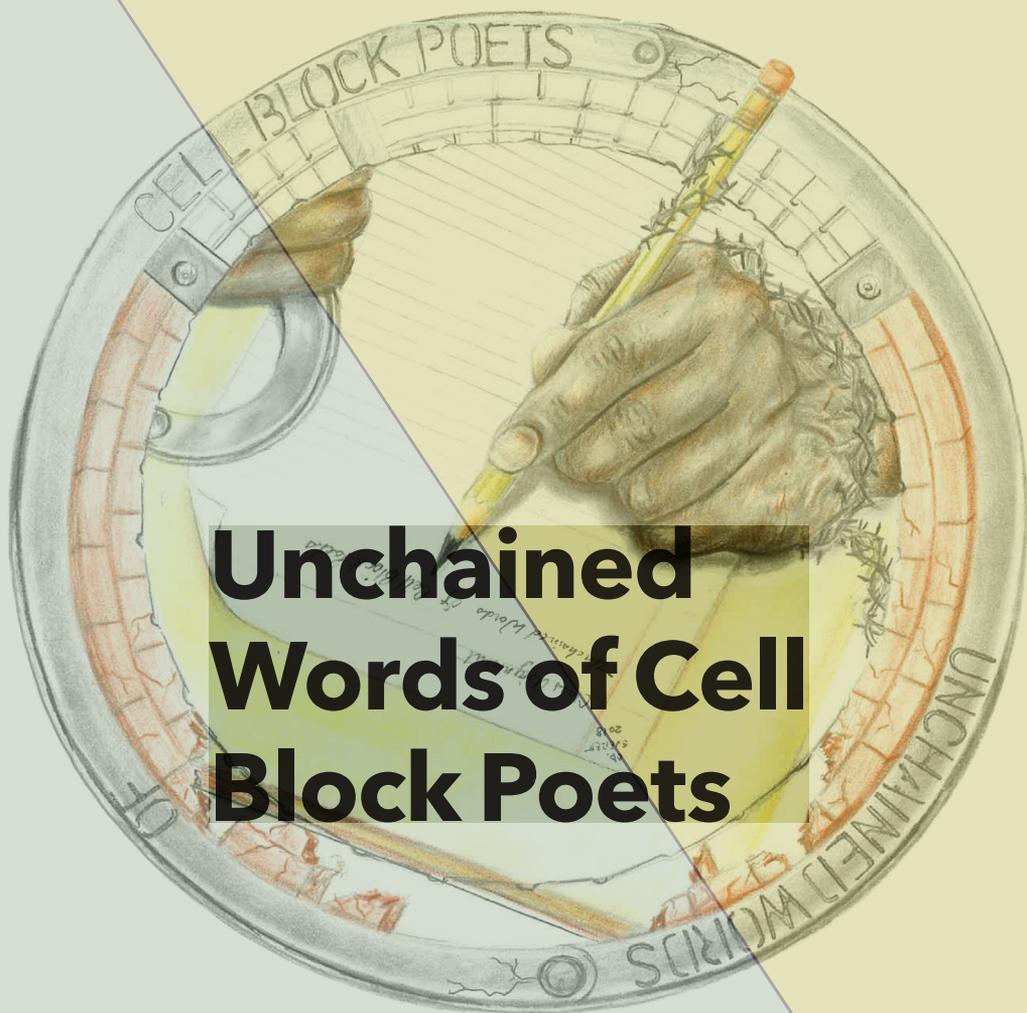


**Writings From
Poetry**



Unchained Words of Cell Block Poets

**Faculty: Tara Betts
2018**

Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project

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Acknowledgements: Thank you to the PNAP teaching collective members and staff for their dedicated work organizing classes and guest lectures at Stateville and exhibitions and events in the community. And thank you to the students at Stateville who write in the late hours of night, during the loudest hours of the day, and against the odds. Your dedication makes us all work harder.

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Contents

A Gold We All Needed: A Brief Introduction 7

Antonio Balderas 9

Kevin Betts 13

Jermaine Blake 17

CD. Everett 20

Darren Henderson 26

Michael Key 35

Albert X. Kirkman 40

Manuel Metlock 42

Jason Muñoz 42

Alex Negrón 47

Derrick Parks 53

JR 56

Devon Terrell 62

Anthony Triplett 69

Joseph Ward-El 73

Joseph Wilson 77

A Gold We All Needed: A Brief Introduction

During the 2017-2018 school year, I found myself working with many different types of students, but the most rewarding class that I've had was the group of students that I was privileged to read, discuss, write, and share poems with at Stateville Prison. After entering visitors' center, being searched, then passing gate after gate, I found myself greeting the uneven gravel path past plump groundhogs to find the squat, squared brick building with heavy, rusted steel doors. I found myself entering the small classrooms where the walls were topped with chicken wire, so discussions reverberated from other classrooms like an echo chamber. One day I brought a CD with Nina Simone songs that echoed into the hall, bold and resonant. We listened in silence and the sun poured into the windows like a gold we all needed to wear that day. Why would we need such a treasure? I will say that even the darkest places let us get a glimpse of light. Poems, the solace in putting a pen to paper, and exploring verses shaped by other poets have been my own much valued gems.

Every week, I have looked forward to looking at works like *The Vintage Anthology of African American Poetry*, the various possibilities in poetic structure in *An Exaltation of Forms*, and then looking more closely at Nate Marshall's award-winning debut collection *Wild Hundreds*. We debated, analyzed and challenged the strengths and shortcomings of what we read. We read essays by poets like Audre Lorde, Marilyn Nelson, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Yusef Komunyakaa. We shared poems so each narrow rectangle of a classroom become its own open mic cipher, and we've finally arrived here with this brief sampling of the many writings produced this year.

In it, you will see joy, frustration, and history. The sonnet, the ghazal, syllabics, a clerihew, and a range of poetic devices peep up their deliberate heads on these pages. There can be a harsh, hard voice side by side with a careful tenderness. There is language that sounds more like the corner than the Ivory Tower, a blues or a hip hop bumping

behind it all. So, if I told you that it came from a maximum security prison, don't worry about my safety or my intelligence. Worry about the safekeeping of the opportunity for everyone to be able to learn, grow, and seek redemption.

Read on,

Tara Betts
Chicago, IL
May 1, 2018

ANTONIO BALDERAS

Antonio Balderas was born in Chicago, Illinois. He is mixed race. His father is Mexican and Native American, and his mother is Afro American. He first became interested in poetry after reading a poem in school—Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask.”

A Crooked Walk!

Antonio Balderas

Today I walked along a crooked path,
on my way to a crooked-shaped dining room full of crooks,
all of whom stared and gave me dirty looks.

I humbly took my seat amongst the crowd who had all
gathered to eat what the men called “chow!”

I ate in silence but my mind was full of thoughts
of the pending journey I would take during my dreaded return
to meet my daily fate, confined to a room with
no view a space with 3 walls and one set of steel
crooked bars.

Nigger-Man, Nigggha-Son, Nigga-Child

Antonio Balderas

Nigger man flying high like a blackbird in the sky.
A Nigggha by any other name is still just a Nigga!
Mr. Charlie taught the nigger to hate himself and
his own kind, Mr. Charlie stole the Nigggha's mind...
The Nigga walks outside his door and looks into the
pretty white sky and sees a blackbird flying about,
at this moment during this scenic observation, the
Nigger is filled with a sense of pride, that is the
way he feels until the blackbird becomes blinded
by the white snow and is blown into the engine of
a white plane only to be shredded into a million
blackbird pieces. The blackbird flies no more.
But who's really keeping score along those shores,
in this white man's world the blackbird lives.
He suffers and then he dies, and that's the way
it is on the blackbird range and on the
blackbird plantation.
Mr. Charlie has been taking the blackbird
Down for hundreds of years and therefore, don't be
Confused about who's pulling the trigger and
Oh yeah, if you happen to look like a black-
bird, you're still viewed as simply just another
Nigger, - Nigggha,- Nigga!

Thoughts

Antonio Balderas

“Thoughts out of this world,
Thoughts not of my kind,
Thoughts deep within the many chambers of my mind.

“Thoughts” born out of hatred and scorn,
Thoughts cerebrally changing my ideas,
Thoughts that activate my fears,

Thoughts hidden beneath the conclaves of my mind,
Thoughts of a slave before my time,
Thoughts fueled by actions showing materialism and greed,
Thoughts of a lost soul that’s last of a dying breed...

KEVIN BETTS

Kevin Betts was a participant in the Fall 2017 PNAP poetry class and a student in the Spring 2018 “Mapping the Self in Community” course with Audrey, Jill, and Miriam Petty.

In Memory of Margaret Walker

Kevin Betts

For my people locked in cages like animals in a zoo
Stand strong, preserver, be resilient because you
Are in a cryochamber, and are being preserved I must say
For a better time, a better life, a glorious day

For my people being shot down at the hands of police
Civil servants sworn to serve, protect, and promote peace
My people, you must rise, and refuse to be a victim
Fight valiantly against an unjust and ungodly system

For my people struggling daily to feed their brood
Get out to walk & talk. It's sure to change your mood
Everything changes nothing remains the same
All it takes is a little positive perspective to master the game

For my people in cruise control enjoying a life of strawberries
and cream
Lend a hand to the down-trodden help them live their dreams
Because some people have not realized what life is about
We must be our brother's and sister's keeper and help them out.

Let the beauty of our souls rise to guide us
and remember any struggle we endure is only a plus
It builds a strength and toughness in our bones
that allows us to radiate happiness all throughout our homes

Mr. Nobody
Kevin Betts

What do you want to be?
I want to be somebody famous.
I saw the President, and wish't I was him.
I saw the Michael Jordan, and wish't I was him.
I saw the Johnnie Cochran, and wish't I was him.
I listened to R. Kelly, and wish't I was him.
But alas, I'm 93 and none of them are me.
I'm still known as Mr. Nobody.

Resolve

Kevin Betts

True power resides in your power to will
Your determination to build
And see your goals achieved—

Once you put your mind to it,
You'll surely do it
Because in you, you must believe—

But if you're looking towards Heaven, or
Hell you will find—

There's truly no power in that kind
Only in the thoughts that emanate from —the
Power of the mind—

Resolve to will—Resolve to build—
Resolve to see—Resolve to be
The master of your own Destiny—

JERMAINE BLAKE

Jermaine Blake was a participant in the Fall 2017 PNAP poetry class.

I Can't Sleep

Jermaine Blake

Silence speaks so much volume, I'm trying to rest, but my mind refuses to go to sleep. Damn... what time is it? 3:59 Hold on. Give me a second—57, 58, 59, 60. I've been trying to stay awake & write this thought in my mind. I know if I go to sleep I'll lose it. I am literally piecing this together on the first page in my Bible. How symbolic is that? Please forgive me if white-ing this piece lacks the rhythm you've taught us today. You have truly been an inspiration, this plant hasn't been watered in many moons—I've survived off the sun. It's crazy that I'm writing in the dark because my cellmate is asleep. Sometimes, I feel like everyone around me is asleep. I was beginning to relate to you—when you said: it's strange that you learned more about either your mom or dad, or your granma after their passing, but your cousin in class interrupted your train of thought. My granma & father passed last year. I'm still not sure how to feel, something is missing. This granny brought me home from the hospital the first day I was born & raised me as her own. I've never tasted a love more sweeter. I'm not sure if it comes that sweet now-a-days. I've never spent 24 hours with my pops, but we've had many years of convo over the phone. I used to tell myself, if I lost him—I couldn't say with all honesty something my father taught me or something good about him, pops was bitter & cold, but since his passing I've learned; we as a people can only love to the capacity that we're able to fulfill. Pops loved me the way he loved me, not how I wanted to be loved. My throat is dry. I need some water. Sometimes the creator will have us cross paths with people whose presence exudes an energy that speaks to the soul. This is the energy that your presence conveys. Might I add, this is not a "come on." Let me lay my ass back down. I don't even know what I'm writing about. I know one thing. I'll still be awake cause I ain't going to sleep.

To Mr. Charlie
Jermaine Blake

To Mr. Charlie:

What is it that you've seen in us that we've yet to see in ourselves? I have noticed it's nearly impossible to see ourselves without a mirror. You are truly ingenious, which I'm sure you already know. How in the hell did you steal our legacy? Real talk, I don't even know who I am. Who I think I am, at times don't seem like me...I feel out of place, something is missing. I heard about the Rosetta Stone you stole. I guess if you plan to destroy a people for many generations to come—it would be smart to rob them of their dialect. Oh yea! I can't forget this "crab in a bucket" mentality you've embedded in us. I bet you sit back with a smirk saying if these darn nigg*rs were smart, they would lend each other their shoulders & once out, reach back & lend a hand to everyone else. (I tell you what, Mr. Charlie) My people are resilient, you can't take that away from us. Dig, Mr. Charlie. I won't bother you any further. I do have one more question...who were we seven days before slavery?

CD. EVERETT

CD. Everett was born and raised in South Shore, on Chicago's Southeast Side. As a youth, he discovered his love for poetry while participating in a Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Contest at Caldwell Elementary School. While most friends know CD. by "Chris," his time away inspired a rebirth of sorts which has led to his adoption of his first two initials. It is this rebirth as an artist and poet that speaks to a new calling, through which CD. hopes to generate change.

Come Home

CD. Everett

Pray
Now that
Come home to the thy Loving Arms
Entrusting all forever;
Hoping that nothing withstands our
True
Destiny.
What night shall dim the light from within
Or cause to fall aside,
Henceforth forever we shall be
Strong
Like a three
Cord strand, enjoying fried eggs, bacon,
And buttered soft grits.
Sin, no doubt, for seeking bliss in
What
Ought to be
Eternally ours. To answer your prayer,
With heart felt angst, above
All else, I hear your call to come Home.

“Feeling Good”

CD. Everett

“Right or Wrong Don’t Matter When You’re With Me My Dear”

Reach out no distance
Wrongs know no rights or left-turns
It don’t matter love

Arms carried away
Voice of another whispers
Vanilla scent clothes

Wright or Wrong my love
When I’m with you in your arms
Nothing else matters.

Her lavender lips
Those vanilla scented sheets
Right or wrong you’re mine

Rose growin' out the snow
CD. Everett

Cold weather chilling
Young bud matter of the snow
Sown deep like thick thighs

Sheltered from above
9 months with no love
Finally the Sun

Kiss my eyes no doubt
The most beautiful to me
Warm below and sweet

The winter air tease
White above with chocolate

The rose in the breeze.

Inspect on my knees.
Her colorful nature poised
Knowing her power.

“Sanctified I’s”

CD. Everett

This is an Introduction to the Called
Whose stance blazed trails across space and time
These are the “Sanctified I’s”-Past, Present, and Future
The “I’s” that believed-Freedom’s-a-callin’
The “I’s” that seen that Ole’-ship-a-comin’
The “I’s” that waded in-da-water
The “I’s” that made it over and under.

The Souls of a People like Ole’ Israel
Down in Egyptland where’s Pharoah make hell
—The “I’s” that grieved-makin’ has to flee
The “I’s” that steal-a-way to Thee
The “I’s” that act by Faith and glee.
The “I’s” knowing nothing ‘cept “Shine on me”

The tide that turned for the sanctified
—Over-flowin Ole’ Master bye-and-bye
The “I’s” that struggled-Sweat and Tears
The “I’s” showed the way to the children for years.
The “I’s” was given life-That Northern light from above
The “I’s” was on a “King” that dreamed-Equality and Love.

Marked by Sacrifice and Chafed by Hate
3/5ths they were labeled of what is human and race
The “I’s” knew better as they are well known
The “I’s” on Freedom spoke loud the Oracles of God
The “I’s” led marches-Sanctified-Arm and Arm.
The “I’s” took pride singing, “We Shall Overcome”

No Bondage or Hate Industrialized
Or Segregated Schools making Prisons Multiply
The “I’s” foretold and was sold that war on crime

The “I’s” now grieved by that trick of time
The “I’s” still stand-Universal and wise
The “I’s” revolution-Exposing their lies.

The Proliferation of Packed Prisons for Black and Brown Crimes
—The destruction of critical resources-Leading Communities
into decline

The “I’s” Impatience swelling-voices saying “Black
Lives Matter”

The “I’s” Motivation breeding Action-over most Politicians
chatter

The “I’s” Whole-hearted “Don’t Shoot” movement reinvigorates
that Black Power

The “I’s” Sanctified though few in number-Upholding Truth
this very hour

What will become of our future if we placate insidious trends

Who will then be uplifted except the Grand Dragon-

If we allow this White House to win?

The “Sanctified I’s” paved the way-To counter and defend
Their blood, sweat, and tears were sown-Through graveyards
of lost kin and friends.

As the green grass grows on old Millennial ground

The echoes of battles they fought is still heard-how sweet
the sound.

The “Sanctified I’s” will forever rise when they hear the call

—As Black History has taught us-Even taking the knee—

The Proud will always Stand Tall.

DARREN HENDERSON

Darren Henderson is a student in Tara Betts' poetry class...He grew up not too fond of writing poems, and it wasn't until he got older that he began to understand that he's been a poet for some time now, and Dr. Betts' poetry class has brought up whatever skill set he does have, so here is some of his work.

A closing, from a dead silence
Now there is an abundance
Of Darkness...
Darren Henderson

Twisting and turning on these
Clouds I'm RESTLESS...

Now Resisting,
My subconscious wants to act out
Reflection on my past
Seen him bend the corner
Hit the gas then I mashed
Out...

Here,
I sit alone
In the comfort of my home
Or least I thought I was
Beautiful and bold, perfectly shaped
But faceless

Confused and Excited
I'm unable to think clear
To my surprise I'm dreaming..

Twisting and turning
And
Influenced by my subconscious my conscious has awoken.
And my conscious wants a say-so
Trying to save my soul, be a hero
Hater...

Removing myself from the top bunk
I braced myself for this departure

Right leg hit the sink; left leg hit the toilet
I'm balanced

AWOL

Darren Henderson

Absent

BECAUSE he's UNCONSCIOUS

Of his obligations AND responsibilities; he's uncommitted

As the, careless and reckless behavior

MIRROR the similarities of his

Past life

Mischievous

AND MOTIVATED he NOW INTENTIONALLY

Misbehave for this hunger.

Starving without an appetite, has the

Belly of this beast feastin' on

Desires

As appetizers.

Wanted...so he carried on

to appease such desire

Hopped in a midnight-blue Benz, after-hours

My now tinted frames got me starin at the dance floor

Appealing to the Naked Eye is

40-28-44 and 38-26-46

Is now

Revealing the Naked Truth

My now tinted frames got me staring at objects

Dank-it-ling in his Rearview

Are headlights, who's that...

The catching comes before the hanging

So steps on gas, dead

Spent!
She's a rider in her own right
Plus she's motivated....
Sick-in-tired of being
Sick-in-tired, so for them

Her is no
Escapin...
V-12 SL500
After 12:00 A.M.
It's clear lanes, BABY...!

The pink navigator did you good
to this point...
But being elusive is a sport of
MINE, you remember
T'was a night before X-mas

Last December...Never Mind
(Pipes growling)

Hannibal the Great

Darren Henderson

A leader of men but a warrior
In his own right. Strong Negroid Feature
Gave history a black eye. Spanish coin
Told the truth African Soldier, Mammoth Rides
Vicious and Noble as a lion's head
Had been the scourge of Rome, nemesis
The story of Hannibal is a tragedy.

Untitled

Darren Henderson

For my people everywhere rappin and singin about
their struggles: their high notes; their metaphors; their
subliminal messages; praying their prayers only when
one feels hopeless and ashamed after bending backwards
for fortune and fame...

For my people on borrowed time who've been lended their
Strength (from yesteryear's inequalities and injustices)
You are now benefitting from the desperate lives of
Slaves who made choices that had to be made for
Survival...So what's your excuse for your own
Oppression...?

For my playmates that became schoolmates that became
Baptized by the lifestyle into hustlers, street dreamers,
thug niggas, hoop dreamers; and the women who became
Pen pals and widows to the lost souls of the penitentiaries
And the graveyards, and the baby mommas of the niggas
from the street corners and them cell blocks that played
hard... if you're still holding it down, you are appreciated!

For the people that told us the game is to be sold not
Told: why didn't you tell us a toe tag was the price-
tag for the cost of not knowing the answer then for the
pricetag; penitentiary chances only advanced a few, now
I'm telling the youth to behave and it's not like you;

For the boys and girls that grew in spite of these things:
Captured and then being scattered like sand...being raped not
Dated...enslaved not freed... run away get lynched,
Dirty south laws Willie Lynch...; you're doing better than
most, pay attention to stay afloat... Natchez, Mississippi

shopping center, slave post!

For my people protesting in Chicago for Laquan McDonald
And Missouri for Michael Brown and New York for Eric Garner,
Inequalities and injustices still exist- you thought we got a
Break when Martin told us his dream, what, do you
Remember what they did to that King... you heard the
Verdict “Not Guilty” L.A. riots, CNN, you remember the
Scenes;

For my people misguided by ink patterns of
Interpretations of men and women whom struggle like you
To find comfort within this space of greed, lust, and
Envy confused with why love feels like hate and hate feels
Like love and this pain feels like both in between, am I, going
Through it like Wilson all net, Kobe Bryant, ice water in my
veins;

For my people who are still staggering from errors and
Still searching to do better from high school dropout to
Getting a G.E.D.; from penitentiary survivor to the pulpit
Mass choir; single parents who are pushing their sons
And daughters to be better than them... college grad- Ph.D.
Look at them; what I’ve witnessed got me pissed- Michael
Taylor hoop dreamer- scholarship to the Univ. of Tenn;
Face down drowning in his own blood from the sounds of
A cop’s gun... in pursuit of suspects where Mike was
Taking a piss behind a tree, cops shout: hands up...
Mike fumbling with his pants; what came next couldn’t
Believe that... my Derrick Rose, Michael Taylor story told...!

For my people still standing not just because they got
Breath in their lungs, but, still standing because they have
Not been defeated by the consistent inconsistencies
Of the indifferences that’s been injected into society by
Ideologies by men and women whom believe in the concept

That by all means necessary: we shall divide and conquer
On any level... “You’re still standing through this confusion
From the hypocrite who miseducated a understanding
Into a groundless assumption that’s being misunderstood
As truths to the youth, with a blind intent now you’ve
Rallied the troops...

Let a mature society rise. Let a generation be born into
Love, truth, peace, freedom, and justice for all. Let a second
Generation full of courage from its peers put forth the
Same efforts of passing the torch. Let the murder and
Mayhem in the streets of Chicago calm. Let a new abeyance
Forestall and create a new beauty within the Chi-ty; like
Vacant lots turned into: play lots, homes, social clubs,
Recreational centers, owned by us! Let new principles and
Concepts be written through the thought process ensured in
The fundamental principles of understanding your self-worth
To obligations and responsibilities to family and civil liberties;
Instead of you finding ways to kill the... let us become
Swift to listen and slow to speak so you can understand why
The understanding was understood and raise your hand to
Ask a question so to- understand how, and now you can
Speak in agreement or disagree all in the same, this level
Of consciousness is opinionated... the process of
Information- interpretations, use your brain.

MICHAEL KEY

Michael Key was a participant in the Fall 2017 PNAP poetry class.

I have come to....

Michael Key

I have come to you tonight out of the belly of the beast, where if we continue to live with our heads in the sand, we'll missthis "so-called" great country of ours transformed into a militarized police state.

I have come out to you from reconstruction eyes that closed on black humanity as Europe, then America began the most prolific and macabre era known to mankind. How greed & the desire to rule & conquer every place & everything they laid eyes on willed them to enslave, murder, rape, kidnap, coerce, bribe, deceive, assimilate, segregate, destruct, and obliterate the cultural, spiritual, mental, emotional & physical. Well-being of the natives, Africans, Latinos, Asians, and even other European nations.

I have come to you from the lynching years, where first, enslavement forced us into foreign lands, with a foreign people, a foreign language, and a foreign culture, which in turn led to the emotional, mental anguish & damage of our ancestors for which future generations are now the recipients & for which we have yet to find a cure, where many former slaves or the children of slaves were re-enslaved less than a generation later through a variety of legal economic means, where decades after slavery was "abolished" unpaid black labor continued to be the backbone of industrial capitalist development, where the structural repression of KKK terror, the mass hangings & burnings, black bodies being eaten and ripped apart by dogs for the so-called crime of looking at a white woman.

I have come to you tonight through the Ida B. Wells years, the Rosa Parks years, the Malcolm X years, the years fighting for

Civil Rights when we should have been fighting for human rights. The I'm black and I'm proud years, the COINTELPRO years, and the Black Lives Matter to no one not even blacks years.

I have come to say that those years were not in vain, that we've lived through all manner of atrocities, demonizations and dehumanizations, that like iron forged in the hottest flames we are stronger, our edges are keener, and our blades only become sharper with every pass of life's coarse and rough whetstone.

I have come to you tonight as an equal, as a brother, as a man who has walked in the shadowed reflection of some of this world's greatest black achievers who taught that education is our passport to the future for "tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today."

I have come to you tonight because no other people in America have been placed into slavery, debt servitude, prison, racial addiction, has been harassed & brutalized, families stolen, homes burned or attacked as blacks. And yet, we stand proud, heads held high, shoulders back, and proclaim to the world that "we would rather die on our feet than live another day, another hour, or another minute on our knees."

I have come to you tonight because there are inhumanitarians in the world, in our country, in our neighborhoods, and living amongst us in our communities. These people are unrecognizable to us because they are not "us." Just as the kidnapping of Africans from the motherland first required assistance from our African brothers and sisters in power, so too is the continued subjugation, enslavement, sell out their lower-class constituents for money and the perception of power.

I have come to you because it is time for blacks to rise

up in unity, one body – one voice, and hold our black leaders responsible for the promises they make but fail to keep. To curb our spending and recognize the power in the black dollar, the black body and the black voice. Again, this must be done as a whole, because a house divided against itself cannot stand...

I come to you because we need to turn our eyes to the Magnificent beauty of our people and the richness of our culture both past and present. That, that beauty comes in many shades & colors, and recognize that, as the original people, it was “us” that set the standard of beauty for the world to follow—both then & now.

I am here to tell you as often as you need to hear it, that “the fool shall not discern your value and shall cast aside a great treasure. But I, your brother, who knows your true worth will face, for you are to your people & to this world a bright star in the night sky. Have & take pride in who you are and what you represent. That you, we, I, must stand for something or continue to fall victim to any and everything white America decides to put us through.

That we as a people have to know where we’ve been, before we can know where we’re going that only we have the psychology and the understanding to deal with our issues, and now we must develop the will to do so. If we continue to be divided or work in splinter cells, if we continue to be disconnected, the thru the that disconnect we will become like 200 animals raised in captivity, never having been taught by other animals in the wild, they don’t know how to hunt or forage to survive in their natural habitat. They are easy to control, and harmless to their controllers.

I am here to say to you as brother George Jackson said to me through wisdom 40 years old; settle your quarrels, come together understand the reality of our situation, understand

that fascism is already here, that there are people already dying
who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor,
butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Do what must be done,
discover your humanity and love in revolution. RAISE UP!!

*This poem was done in love & solidarity to our sister Sonia Sanchez.
Thanks you for your contribution to this world, and our people.*

ALBERT X. KIRKMAN

Albert X. Kirkman was a participant in the Fall 2017 PNAP poetry class and briefly in the Spring 2018 session. He was also in Dr. Margaret Burroughs' poetry class.

For My People

Albert X. Kirkman

For my people who made it through the kidnappings
and whippings. Transported from land to land, executing
the whiteman plan.

For my people that's working two jobs, check to check,
too tired, overworked, and less paid.

For my people trying to get an education
but hampered by racist teachers, poor materials,
overcrowding and poor funding.

For my people living the American dream,
nice house, nice clothes, and nice cars.

Let me people see the sun that shines after
the darkness. Never relying on the enemy,
to take care of us anymore. Great futures,
unity and success is promised.

MANUEL METLOCK

Manuel Metlock uses writing as a way to express himself, a way to attack sensitive issues in a powerful way, to allow his voice to carry beyond the limits imposed around him.

My Tears of Thee

Manuel Metlock

I was once told that I was 3/5 of a man
Never to be looked at as whole
Never to be considered a real American
Distinguished by many names
Nigger, boy, negro, darky, colored, African American
A foreigner trapped inside a strange land
being blown away like dust in the wind
punished, because of the melanin in my skin.
It will always be a distinction
since they want to bring us to the point of extinction.
Some will argue “we’s free now!”
Anything contrary to this thinking must be senile.
Even with a Black President, tell me what do you see now?
Institutional racism, and they are shooting us dead in
the streets now.
I give you Driving While Black to show you that it is
an illusion that “we’s free now!”
They traded in white sheets for black robes
systematically positioned to steal young black souls
The whole world is in the palms of their hands and
they’re never letting go.
Am I an American, you ask?
Yes, but only if every flag is being flow at half-
mast as a sign of oppression, and a distress of a
nation who has a history of discriminating against
people of a darker descent.
Will She ever truly repent or continue to hide
The evilness that lies between the red, white and
blue lines...or will my people continue to die?
In a so-called free country,
why do I cry my tears for thee!

JASON MUÑOZ

Jason Muñoz was a participant in the Fall 2017 PNAP poetry class and the Spring 2018 “Mapping the Self in Community” course with Audrey, Jill, and Miriam Petty.

Considering Kahlil

Jason Muñoz

...Reading that prophet's words,
I felt as if I had been wasting my life.
The sentiment is that to love is to live,
When interacting with spouses or kin or strangers,
That these encounters be rooted, as deeply and firmly
As the ceiba, in love.
How simple and profound.
What has motivated my encounters throughout life?
I am ashamed of my heart's response.
What has motivated my encounters throughout life?
Sure, we can rebuild the "middle wall" separating writer
and reader—
Poor Almitra;
As they say, the sword is not worn for naught.
And whose sword pierces more deeply, more fiercely, than
Love's?
I am overwhelmed.
I can't wait to see Love's finished work.
I can't wait.

A Sonnet

Jason Muñoz

Much is in number twenty-nine
I find myself wishing I could trace places with him;
If only for half a time.
Tethered souls and envisioned dungeons alluding,
yearning to fly and to sing as that lark at heaven's gate.
Is this my fate?
Is this where I will die?
If so, know that your embrace is all I imagine;
Know that yours is the only love for which I pine.
Do you feel the same as I?
Have you "troubled deaf heav'n with your bootless cries' and
questioned why?
"Pray for me, my love." I am drowning.
"Pray for us, my love." I cannot sleep.
Pray

"Number Twenty-Nine" is a reference to William Shakespeare's "Sonnet #29," as is the "lark at heaven's gate" and the "troubled deaf heav'n" line.

ALEX NEGRÓN

Alex Negrón is a published writer and poet who uses his creative expression to make the public aware of the historical harms of mass incarceration. He was born and raised in the city of Chicago, and his work can be found on PrisonFoundation.org and PrisonLectionary.net.

Blood, Sweat & Tears

(Epigram)

Alex Negrón

Constant heckling and nasty jeers
Wrongfully convicted by a jury of his peers.
When He gave up the ghost—
A soldier blatantly chose
To pierce his side with a spear.
That's the same pain I felt when the
Judge handed me 50 years----
Blood, sweat and tears...

Boriken Mythology

Alex Negrón

When
it rains it
pours. Some say the Goddess is sad-
dened. She loves a prince and
no one knows what really happened.

Co-
quí, Coquí
A native prince decked in beauty
El Yunque's Goddess seized
Him to enjoy his company

He
fought against
the wicked chupacabra that en-
slaved the island's creatures.
The frogs and parrots had no leisure.

Freed,
at Last, ti-
ny frogs proudly chanted his brave name.
They cry on behalf of
the Goddess to return to her domain.

Cris-
tobal Col-
ón named it the island of Rich Ports,
but my ancestors titled
it the land of Bravest Cords.

Co-
quí, coquí

A rhythm that syncs with my Boriken
heartbeat, coquí coquí—
A sound so natural to sing.

Co-
quí, coquí.
When I behold it in my eyes. It
does not let out a peep.
The creature must realize that my—

Blood-
line is na-
tive royalty and my destiny is
filled with regality. Co-
quí, coquí: frogs with so much mystery...

The Strangest Fruit
Alex Negrón

Life has bidden me
To eat what's in front of me
This rotten tree covers me with
Its bloody leave while
I spit out its bitter seeds

Rightfully so—
This is the strangest fruit,
It entered the bloodstream fresh
But each bite tastes like soot
And it seethes my wretched flesh...

¡Viva La Mar!
Alex Negrón

¡Viva La Mar! ¡Viva La Mar!
Marry yourself to the blue seas—
We fight besides El Capitán
From the Carib to worlds afar.
Freed ourselves from the king's tyranny.
Our loyalty we had to disavow.
He favored his son over our valor.
We serve a purpose, we are proud.
Our principles cannot be anchored
!Viva Lar Mar! Down with the crown!

DERRICK PARKS

Derrick Parks was born under the zodiac sign of Gemini. He grew up between Kalamazoo, Michigan and East St. Louis, Illinois. His journey to the penitentiary began down a crooked path that was riddled with one bad decision after another, but it was this journey that opened the doors for him to discover his ability to express a thought or an emotion in a poem. So, enjoy!

Fallen Nature

Derrick Parks

How did I end up being held captive to sin?
Was it my disobedience or a bite of an apple?
Because this life of enslavement imprisons all men,
just look through the centuries, for example.

Was it my disobedience or a bite of an apple?
That allowed my nature to express itself this way.
Just look through the centuries, for example.
To uncover the fallen state of man on display.

That allowed my nature to express itself this way,
Opening me up to the yearning of my flesh.
To uncover the fallen state of man on display,
peeling back layer after layer until I'm undressed.

Opening me up to the yearning of my flesh,
My personal will desires to direct my life.
Peeling back layer after layer until I'm undressed.
What was not seen in the dark is now in the light.

My personal will desires to direct my life,
carving four major areas into their own part.
What was not seen in the dark is now in the light,
tying the spiritual, social, physical and emotional
to my heart.

Carving four major areas into their own part,
how did I end up being held captive to sin?
tying the spiritual, social, physical and emotional
to my heart,
because this life of enslavement imprisons all men.

My Sight

Derrick Parks

Looking beyond a moment in time; at the end
Helps me unwind, my wandering mind, at the end.

Because I am a slave to the passions
And desires, this world has defined, at the end.

While tracing my steps back to my true self,
Not knowing what I will find, at the end.

Since the things I've experienced and
Seen, was truly sublime, at the end.

Creating visual memories of a life lived,
Sipping red wine that's been refined, at the end.

You see, I'm Silkey Red, and I'm still alive
No longer buried out of sight, at the end.

JR

JR is a native of the South Side of Chicago and a proud father of five, and his poetry is mostly inspired by each one of them. Americah, Mauri, GG, Nyiah & Aushawn, I love you guys.

Awareness

JR

Our tradition is what we inherit, not what
We create because we were all born beautiful.
Created in the image of a higher power and completed
with individual uniqueness.

Our tradition is what we inherit, not what we
create, long as you remember you were born
from greatness. Blessed with a lineage where
your ancestors ruled the lands they walked.
Always being leaders & not followers.

Our tradition is what we inherit, not what we
create because we set the bar high and it's only
right that we look good doing it. Our blood-
lines are royal, so we must carry on the torch
of those kings and queens from which we derive from.

A Better Place

JR

There is no place like home
That's what Dorothy said.
My thoughts seem to be her clone
once stripped of my bed.
What used to be familiar
No longer holds its shape.
I now see myself in that mirror
asking why I'd leave that place.
I pray that one day I'll return
The suspense, it keeps me lit.
There's a chance my home has burned.
Will the pieces even fit?
Hope to see that life again
I've asked forgiveness for my sins.

Reflections

JR

I

Am a Guy
tortured by his own dreams and in-
nermost regrets. Haunting
me are the sins from a previous life.

Why
would I cry
from these self-inflicted wounds of mine,
tears won't take away the time.
But I can reflect back on what was

Choices
Are the voices.
That wreck all thoughts for your own good.
Why leave home for the hood?
The mind is truly filled with foolishness.

Free
set me Free
My mind is a war zone conflicted
by ideas born to be evicted
insanity is the mind of the beholder

Live
just to give
Your freedom up for a false reputation.

The price sure devastation
Have you no honor to the Higher-ups,
Who
Only for you
Created humanity to our likeness
Talk about underserved kindness
Too much to ask to just cherish it huh?

Life

What is yours like
Broken with disgust from leaving your kids
Oops that is what I did
Now what is left, birthdays on cards
 Chance
The last stance
I'll take, if I'm to ever move forward
Don't reflect, aim toward
a peace that awaits in the hereafter.

Still Dreamin

JR

A vivid picture painted of you
And her, color schemes like rainbows
Beautiful like the morning dew
Both is beauty is more greater than few
How can the world compete only Lord knows
A diamond, a ruby, flawless at sight
A dream come-true, A perfect life complete
Your laugh, her smile, like flying a kite
The love is strong, it makes me weep
A magical life, just seems so right

DEVON TERRELL

Devon Terrell joined the PNAP poetry workshop in Spring 2018. He is also a student in the University Without Walls program.

Leroy Went North (1937)
Devon Terrell

I
Let da dye
Cas an lay its all beena gamble
I bet half my scramble
Days tween earning keep an lonely

Nights
My las might
Gon strum dis here riggidy guitar
Gots no home got no star
up dere n dat black canopy

Nope
I laffs jokes
b good fo ones widda funnybone
saw George Price woman one
come ovuh from Mississippi she

say
Leroy play
Me a song dis ol man wits b quick
Like a match strik an if
George gon b undo Henry work

Truck
Imma tuck
her n widda tune make old luvuhs
wanna c if cuvuhs
still get warm afta all that time

Strange

i had range
dis episode take prolly 3-4
hours drank lil nap ya know
aint been in no bed so roomy

maw

an my paw
always says outta they 13 kids
i da child who cheese slid
off da crakuh i makes her

moan

George come home
dat white woman scream GET DIS NIGGA
OFF ME! his hand wenna
wrechin now im in Chicago.

Lucid

Devon Terrell

Blue pill or red ills. Lies truth one or the other.
Real or matrix I need proof one of the other.

The cycle of life questioned my own vainglory.
To know or believe it's moot, one or the other.

Blood-moon wolves rave the cold taste of egoism.
Now it's fight or flight no truce one or the other.

In a zero-sum game rules favor the makers.
We all lose but forced to choose one or the other.

Shadows and reflections only give vague answers
Dead or alive, Dee, are you one or the other.

Stateville C-House Cell 444
Devon Terrell

I walk on time
eleven steps in a
size ten. toe to
heel heel to toe
in length through ghost
of dead men. Seven
steps in a size
ten. heel to toe
toe to heel in
width. I walk on
stratums of paint that
tell the story of ages.
black gives way
to grey gives way
to maroon give way
to a beige beginning.
it looks like a
microscope image of an
aggressive circus violently consuming
life. this rorshach floor
dances with my sanity
as i watch caged
birds fight for flight
that morphs into a
scarfed teddy bear or
is that a leash
round his simple neck.
eleven steps in a
size ten. toe to
heel. heel to the toe
in Length. Seven steps
in a size ten

heel to the toe
to heel in width
through ghosts of dead
men. this floor leads
nowhere. you must learn
to levitate.

The Whistler

Devon Terrell

As a child I begged for sky
and lessons to fly because I found
it hard living in Babylon, where the
last conversations around the kitchen table
were exchanges of chaos and echoes of
silence.

With out last two and a half
dollars the old whistler staggered in poor
light to give a master's class to
Miss Viola, leaving us deep rooted in
scarcity.

Cherry and sugar plum lullabies turned to chants
of mutiny. We learned to pivot when
momma's lamentations began to blow back and
fire.

That summer the whistler mistook the sound
of spurs for lovebells and forgiveness. I
never

forgot his voice. NO, baby, NO! PLEASE!
HELP!

PLEASE LORD JESUS, HELP! I'M SORRY, WAIT!
PLEASE! SOMEBODY CALL THE POLICE! Never heard
a man scream like that since. Caterpillars
ain't supposed to evolve into dragons. That's
life here. Many felt he had it
coming.

ANTHONY TRIPLETT

Anthony (Tony) Triplett:

-member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity

-Editor of Write to Be Poems

-Author of Pen With Words

-Member of Poetry Foundation

-Harlem, New York

I Come To You

Anthony Triplett

I come to you knowing more than many
In regards of political and social situations,
Understanding the reasoning behind “racism” and “socialism”..

I come to you seeking equality, not knowing
equality can’t be sought, but subconsciously “bought”

I come to you from the womb of a selfless mother,
Instilled with values of self-respect
and dignity, and trying my best not to lose them.

I come to you as a “realist,” not seeking the
truth, because I don’t believe in looking for
something that’s right in front of my face,
which is why I seldom use mirrors.

I come to you knowing how the world and
government actually works, and willing to tell
you the actual truth: “Equality” is a fairy tale
myth along the lines of Christmas and Thanksgiving
We’re told what to believe and accept, knowing what
we’re being taught is a lie, because truth itself is
hard to digest...

Who Are These People?

Anthony Triplett

Most of us
Know the difference
Between wrong and right
But who are these people
That decide
What's wrong and right?
Who are these people
The ones that say
"You and I are equal"
They shoot unarmed black men
On a regular
And say it's legal
But will give us
"natural life"
For killing one of our own
Because when it comes to us
That's illegal
Who are these people?
Who decides
what's wrong and right?
Some wear black robes.
Because their hooded sheets got too tight!!!
They sit on their benches
and control the system
They call us offenders,
but we're really
the victims...
Who are these people
That make the laws?
They endorse perfection
But they're saturated in flaws
Who are these people?

Who's to tell me
how to provide for my daughters
They support their children
selling weed in Colorado
But I can't support mines
selling dimes & quarters
Who are these people?
You have my mind scattered,
beaten and shattered
The "before" is screwed up,
But so is the "after"
Who are these people...

JOSEPH WARD-EL

Joseph Ward-El is fifty-four years old. He writes poetry 'cause his flow is radiant. He dreams, he sleeps, and thinks about writing. He is a writer.

Foul Play is Still Gunplay

Joseph Ward-El

Since Columbine it was mass shootings,
An outcry for gun control;
Or banned assault rifles,
Just to Get the NRAs Attention or—
Congress Did too much hooting.
Did I forget the kids at Sandy Hook,
Let Alone A Church in South Carolina—
Just More Shootings
Nobody cared when it was on the Block
A Nine Milly Fully Loaded, a Trey Five,
Or Another glock.
T'was a niteclub in Florida,
Not A School Last Year, Right?
CHICAGOPUBLICSCHOOLS—
DO NOT Have Mass Shootings,
Ask Me Why?
Mayor Emmanuel Closed Most of Them,
It was Foul
Congress Did Not Follow-Up—
Guess it was their style.
This Past Valentine's Day Massacre,
Florida Again Mass Shooting—
Too Much Blast,
Seventeen People Lost Their Lives—
Gone so Fast.

The Panther

Joseph Ward-El

Move
Through the jungle
Of crescent star surroundings
Adjust your sunglasses
The Vibranium May Blind

You
The Riches
Are For Wakanda Tribes Only No Outsiders
They Want the Vibranium
Shysters will do Evil

Steal
Maybe kill
For A new Weapon of Mass Destruction
Just the Powers Always Be
Please leave Well Enough T'Challa

Prince
Well Alone
Underestimate his loyal sistas
They will bring the Fight to You
Shall Be Known You Faced A Worthy
Foe
So Prop it
The Undergod is a Panther
A Powerful Large Cat No Extinct Bengal Tiger
One Dark As The Night Ya

Heard
When He sleeps
The Entire Loyal Soldiers Are Woke

When He Preys the conquered weep
Now Do I Have Your Attention

Huh

The Last Dance

No Second Chance or Do Over Sir

Roll With Them or Get Rolled

One Cannot Say it Any Plainer

Source

Wakanda

The Eastern Africa Never Invaded By

Europeans Just Us

Kept to themselves which is who they Trust

JOSEPH WILSON

Scorpio Queen

Joseph Wilson

Her bite
Her sting
We all go blind
When it comes to the Queen.

Her looks may change.
Her name may change
The Scorpio Queen
Dimensions ahead of the game.

Perfect curves
Designed
To fit her frame.

She's every man's dream
One in the same.
The way she walks
-demands-
 attention
double take
 not only from men
as if I had to mention
men of other signs stutter
when they try to approach.

A Queen recognizes a King
As she holla out
"What's up, Scorpio."
My mind begins to wonder
how it tastes down under.
I want to strike
to make her glance

This dream has found my hands
within my pants.
I can't awake.
The Queen has me in a trance.
I knew she was "poisonous"
I was at the funeral
of the last man.
But it's something about the
 Scorpio Queen
you have to take a chance.

Her bite
Her sting
We all go blind
when it comes to the Queen.

Dreams come true,
I know how this may look to you.

Two become one, as I let my
ray rise into her sun.
Heavenly felt
My heart melts
I let down my guards
Paralyzed
As I tried to scream out for "help"
A voice out of nowhere asked
What language do you speak.
I said "English"
to no response, her tail comes up
right to the head, I was done.

The Scorpio Queen walked away.
No sirens
No yellow tape
Her hips still swangin

as she moved toward the sunset
Crazy as it may sound.
I don't wish our eyes never met.
It was worth
Her bite
Her sting
As I went blind
to the Queen.

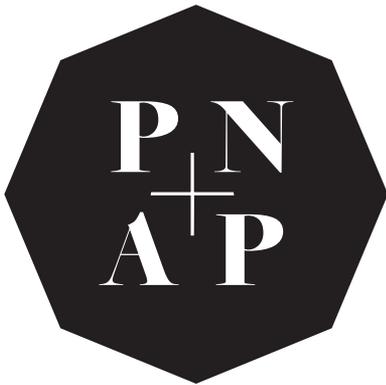
Time

Joseph Wilson

Time is an illusion when people use words like
forever, eternity, everlasting. Time!
When we only have together the moment
in which we share—Time!
The now, Time!
Tomorrow not promised, Time!
The thoughts of the mind, body, and
heart, is always changing—Time!
To protect what we have, if you're truly invested, Time!
In us, Time!
It's time to commit, not to tomorrow, next
week, or even next year— Time!
The now, as we share in the moment— Time!
For we've been blessed with Time!
No matter the situation— Time!
Distance— Time!
Until we're together again—Time!
Recognize our hearts— Time!
In which we are apart—Quee Time!
From each other— Time!
Smile for the moment— Time!
We share at this— Time!
For we are blessed with— Time!
Count me in to say yes, about— Time!
I gladly accept— Time!
You being a part of my mind— Time!
As a constant thought— Time!
Part of my body— Time!
In which I feel a constant reaction— Time!
My heart— Time!
Which I always hold— Time!
A special place in— Time!

Just for you— Time!
No, time is not ours— Time!
What we have— Time!
I'm proud to share it— Time!
With you— Time!
My time— Time!
 Time's up!!! Time!!!!!!
Time!!!! Time!!!!

Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project (PNAP) is a collective of artists, writers and scholars who organize arts and humanities classes for people at Stateville prison. Each year, scholarly and creative work is developed in the prison that is then exhibited in neighborhood galleries. PNAP understands access to education and art to be fundamental human rights capable of transforming people, systems, and futures.



**Prison +
Neighborhood
Arts
Project**