

MY CONFINED SPACE

MY WORK STATION



MY CONFINED SPACE, MY WORKSTATION

As part of the Prison Neighborhood Arts Project's ongoing collaboration between artists incarcerated at Stateville prison, and artists on the outside, this written collection challenges our conceptions of neighborhoods and community. Contrary to the fantasy of expelling from our community people who have been convicted of crimes, the authors represented here resist isolation through collaboration. This is happening. It's part of your neighborhood.

This collection came out of a 2013-2014 poetry course co-taught by staff members at the Poetry Foundation. Each student in the class was welcome to submit, and the enclosed choices were the most striking to the editors, or seemed to be in dialogue with one another. The editors also took the liberty to group and order poems not necessarily by their author, but—loosely—by themes that reoccur: the power of poetry, memory of adolescence, realities of incarcerated life, and political protest are some of those themes. These poets deftly utilize a variety of forms and don't balk at the most difficult philosophical questions.

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Metaphors

Are we too blind to read the signs
Disregarding the warning or cautions
Life now at an auction, full of
Have or Have Nots,
Big Spenders or Broke Niggas
Fast talker and slow learner
Every time I give Birth to a line, let it
Marinate in my pot, under a slow burner
So alert the coroner, there's going
To be casualties—
Keep insisting to move forward
In stupidity, then it's my destiny
To bring ya back to reality
Cause I was born with exquisite taste
Real big on Loyalty—
Instead of closing my eyes
I stare right down the barrel of adversity
It's a drought on real poetry
So my ears stay thirsty
Knew you heard of me
My aim is to change this
Commercial game
With pen point acuity
Don't be silly, rather get your tooth
Pulled than try and battle me
Know the shit I spit, venom
Should be prohibited
Because it changes lives, opinions
And personalities.
Don't matter how you want it
Anaphora, enjambment, quatrain,
Ghazal, metaphors or simile
Just call it a grown man flow
With a touch of growth and maturity, yesterday
Poets really bore me. Because I
Can I relate more to Nikky Finney, and I
Don't mean disrespect to
Those come before me
But if spoken word's yo language
Then I must speak poetry fluidly
You think Shahid Nice
Well, I'm something like an armed
Robbery, real messed up debauchery

So leave them hands up
For this Fed-Ex delivery
You can be diagnosed with
Alzheimer's, but remember me
Real classic proficiency
Got lyrics to fit my formality
Color, Creed, religion or nationality
Juvenile had 'bout 400 degrees
But never hot as me, need answers,
Well keep them, he's out yo bars
Then no one can question yo credibility
An' remember to prosper, you must
First conquer them 4 biggest fears of life
That Death, Poverty, Change,
And Uncertainty

By: Clifton Young

The Poet!

I speak through words that have been written a thousand times.
I speak metaphorically in the form of stanzas I make Rhyme.

I speak through words from the deep recesses of
my mind; a skein of ideas molded until fine.

I speak from the depths of my inner soul, it's those words
I write that unfold stories that must be told.

The words I illustrate and create form poetry;
therefore I proclaim that I am a poet, at first though
I didn't even know it.

By: The poet.

Black Space Nerd

I was talking about Uranus
heard it from a quasar,
Send a black hole at you, take
out your whole solar,
Interplanetary revolutionary,
my blackness so inhospitable,
Yet, I'm teaming with life cuz
my planets so diggable.

I'm hungry Sun, I could eat a planet,
turn around and crap a comet.
My light years reach her retinas
at 186 thousand miles per second.
She said "U-N-I can verse
just spare me your fallacies.
My milky way entered her
heavenly body igniting her galaxy.

A star is born, galactic baby
fresh from mama's womb
10 million year cradled in her
Nebulous cocoon.

by Patrick Pursley aka Bilal Shakur

Adolescent Anger

Behind the walls of self you hide
Blocks created by arrogance and pride
Keeping you from the world,

You built the walls in a few short years
Of pain, guilt, pressure and tears
Glued together by resentment and fear.

Not thinking about the price of your gain
When taking from others and causing them pain
Sometimes nearly driving yourself insane,

You claim the pressures had you over-loaded
And that you nearly exploded
But no one told you that life was candy coated.

“What is the key?” you say,
To take life simply day-by-day?
To face life head on, and not run away?

Just keep searching and you’ll find the key
A way past pride and vanity
And how to survive life gracefully.

So, live today and leave behind the rest
Giving it all your very best
And seeing yourself passing all of life’s tests.

Quick to light, slow to burn,
Causing pain before you learn
To let it go and quietly pass
Into the world of the forgotten past.

By Cornelius Lewis

Show and Tell

I’m going to show and tell
the world how you bullying me.
Why are you messing with me?
Leave me alone,
let me be
You, I’m different
Why you hatin’
On my swag.
The way I dress,
the way I talk,
the way I look,
the complexion of my skin.
For my uniqueness
and cultural practice.
You mock me,
ridicule me,
with your peers,
send text messages
full of jeers
so I will feel insecure
for being here.
I’m going to show you.
I’m blinded by
anger and fear.
I want to be
accepted and respected
for who I am.
But it seems
we can’t get along.
Due to your bullying
my blood is boiling
my heartbeat increase,
tears in my eyes,
my hands are shaking.
My emotions are interfering
with me making rational decisions,
So I decide to bring a gun
to school
with this false
sense of power
I’m going to make
you the fool.
I’m going to make

you feel
my pain
my shame
my desperation
and make you
insecure.
Your bullying is
oppression
denying me freedom
of self-expression
self-determination.
I'm going to show and tell
the world
through violence
and aggression
stop the killing
and bullying.
It starts
with
treating others like
you want to be treated.
Love,
Respect,
mercy,
compassion,
Will bring an end
to
bullying and oppression.

By: Cedric X Cal

What We Call Fun

That day before the gathering we were all smiles knowing there would be heavy competition between the two of us to see who would come up with the most chicks, so we took flicks and poses as if we were being prepped for a GQ magazine feeling we couldn't be told shit.

I began to bust a quick two-step and you headed to the window letting out a sigh, and when I spun your way you were staring up at the sky. I recall you saying, "It's raining cats and dogs out here and the fog is thick as fuck." I replied, "Fuck it, we still gon' do what it do." Then we took a blunt to the head.

We were in pure playa mode after that and we exited my apartment in good spirits.

Once we were at the party we blended in with the rest of the drunks, smoked some skunk and drank until we were drunk, listening to the sounds of P-Funk as though the sounds were coming from my trunk. We bobbed our heads to the music having a good old time and 3 hours later we were two-stepping out of our minds, acting as though we were painted-face mimes, putting on a show that was one of a kind.

After getting fucked up we agreed to leave the party while we still felt strong, ended up finding two chicks and rode around in our boxer shorts while they chilled in their thongs blazing a bong.

"It's raining out here," is what you said, and within minutes we drove off on a green light; somehow you were the one who ended up dead.

Just so you know as we were doing what we call fun, a stray slug came from out of nowhere to take your life and we crashed at the next light.

By: Kevin Dugar

Back On Track

Finally back on track, so many years of separation
Once was the streets, now our family, the congregation
It's been way too many years of separation

Being a child of God, sure to face more trials and tribulations
Know better, do better, thinking with high expectations
It's been way too many years of separation

Cut all the nonsense short, abbreviations.
Rebuke without hesitation,
Because Satan can fill your thoughts with retaliation
It's been way too many years of separation

Time to have respectful relationships
Grow in faith, discipline, and determination
Understand Revelations
It's been way too many years of separation

Let staying focused on internal life be your motivation
To the Lord give a lifetime of praises and dedication
Then we can honestly say: Finally back on Track
From way too many years of separation

By: Clifton Young

Jumpin' Out the Box

Jimi lit his instrument on fire, then smashed it.

I snapped my pencil,
Blended it in a cup of red Kool-Aid.

Now, EVERYTHING is free.

By Anthony M. Spaulding

The Message Is

The message is that she's life, like a great body of water
That will take your oxygen and you can no longer breathe.
Tides, you can swim, so you going in,
You better tighten up that backstroke.

Raphael

By: Carl Williams

Woman

The beauty of her sticks in the depths of your memory.
It is the way to educate your eyes.
Ten measures of her beauty is upon the world.
I'm taking nine and giving the rest of the world one.

Raphael

By: Carl Williams

Where My Thoughts Begin!

A skein of ideas within the chambers of my mind,
thoughts out of this world; thoughts not of my kind.
The thoughts that are forming in my hand are foreign
and intertwined, still connected to my outer cortex,
however, these thoughts are being processed by my
brain—as not thoughts of mine.

Where my thoughts begin has now started to unwind
and all my mental parts become still, yet some that
are related to my cerebellum only want to kill.

I paused to clear my mind in order to calibrate
my thinking, but my brain only wants to celebrate,
so I cerebrally allow the party to begin—suddenly
the other chamber of my cerebrum starts to itch.

So I scratch my head that activates the switch,
my mental light comes on but no one is at home.
It appears my thoughts have returned from
where they began.

By: The Poet

To Force Oneself On Others, To Pass Off On Others, To Take Unfair Advantage

Clang heard as the door clicks reverberating its imposition.
My pacing is eyeballed carefully by a close stranger that doesn't welcome the imposition.

I sleep just feet away from a stainless steel toilet
and its flush is the most violent sounding crash of imposition.

Galleries of conversations mingle into a roaring hum of non-silence,
silently making silence a psychological imposition.

I never touched the key to the door that my life stands behind.
It opens for chow, yard, visits and class time. An open door to imposition.

I was told to call my confined space my workstation.
Your livelihood is creative employment of your time and imposition.

Outside my cell I'm locked in a series of areas that reinforces
the idea that my being outside my cell is an imposition.

Calendars are trying to stack themselves to reach my height.
Their stare is the most menacing, heart piercing Jesus wept imposition.

I tell my own self, "I'm ready to lock up," every day.
As if no one ever called me Sherwood. As if I can't define imposition.

By Dustin Sherwood

The Lost I Am

I am fire and brimstone
I am the second coming in the zone.

I am the peasant, the peon,
the nonaffiliated, the neutron,

I am the king without a throne,
the follower disciple, the rolling stone
riddled with vice

I am the persistent idea that can't be
stifled. I am nothing nice.

I am the prisoner, the suffrage,
the languishing slang,
I am the nigga with no name
buried in an unmarked grave,
I am the suffering product
of America's capital gains.

I am the venom and the antidote,
the unspoken word, the forgotten
quote.

I am the sun kissed silence,
the restrained violence
within a movement of
antiviolence.

I am that black dawn of gratitude,
the cry of freedom in the echoes
of solitude.

I am heretofore
until I am here
no more.

By: Patrick Pursley AKA Bilal Shakur

Everywhere Is War

Wars
rumors of wars
everywhere is war.
The first casualty of war
is the truth.
Who does war benefit?
Surely, not me, not you.
The war on drugs
is on us black youth.
The war on poverty,
We still in a 400-year depression.
Where's our stimulus package?
The war on terror
is about guns, oil, and drugs
pillaging the resources of
the third world.
War is economics
it only benefits
the oligarchs and
their co-conspirators.
The ignorant masses
are being deceived
they defending freedom
and democracy. Patriots become
collateral damage
to their corporatacny
Joining the military who
are mercenaries for
multi-corporations.
Social programs are sacrifice
to imperialistic banksters
who desire natural resources
of nations.
It's not in the budget
to cultivate human beings,
school buildings closing,
the roads are deteriorating,
unemployment rate increases,
food deserts in every city,
home foreclosures are
the order of the day.
Medicare and Social Security
has been usurped

by weapons of mass destruction.
Humanity is suffering
at the hands of mercenaries
puppet tyrannical regimes
international banksters.
The blood-suckers of the poor
blood-shedders
mischief-makers,
War is everywhere
Peace can't be found
until the peace-breaker
is destroyed.
Armies,
gathering for the doom
the clash of civilizations,
everywhere is war.

By: Cedric X Cal

When You Play God

Unbeknownst to you God never sleeps.
Hence, no one prays to U during Twitter beefs.

As cold-blooded as they come—anaemic. U love those
Demonstrating in the signs of the spiritually bulimic.

Get a crystal clear drawing in my Trayvon hoodies.
Anarchist, soft minorities, smited incitement cause u woodies.

When U sucked on Socrates, her phalanges did Beethoven.
Harlem Globetrotters, WWF Wrestling, NBA get your juices flowin’.

Do U reside in Soy Illinois or Dirty Hater America?
U choose to unplug old folks’ life support, that why we stare at ya’.

Location? Promiscuous prison cell; towards it, we are celibate.
Why does God die? She doesn’t. Brush up on your etiquette.

You’ve done the stockbroker thing and blessed us in arrogance.
Haywood Market, black sites, playing non-existent is your inheritance.

U sip emotional sauce from baby mommas and welfare queens.
I know U commit sex crimes against Third World regimes.

At the roundtable “unauthorized books” of the Bible, labeled a fraud.
In “clean English,” 50 schools closed; it’s cold when U play God.

U spend your life pulling us over, trying to stop us.
My Bible and Quran are like a thousand choppers.

I keep my hat ace deuce and stay strap—yet U find me odd.
It’s a cold-blooded measure that U find it ok to play God.

By Henry Lovett

The Fires Burning

The fires burning. The world is a lab. Filled with people whose skin resembles many colors, with the mentality of crabs. Their affection they gave is from semi-automatics and AK’s that sprays. Fascinated with death in bloodbaths they bathe, stuck in ignorant ways, They coming out the cradle to the graves. Confused and dazed, lost souls stuck in a mental maze.

The fires burning, mental maze of ego trip pin, Seagram gin sipping. Hands unclutched from lifebut to death they gripping. Heartbeat skipping, taking us on a downward spiral.
Life leaking and drifting, depictions of fictions, seen in high definition.
Chaos kicks into last gear ----- shifting.

The fires burning. Shifting are the parasites of the night who invade homes like roaches, ants and termites. Dangerous minds combine and become turbulent, (Gone like the wind).
Packing a punch like we ate C-4 for lunch (explosive). Slowly losing sight, no vision, no light dark nights taking flight, swinging swords in the dark of the night. It’s a hard pill to swallow. Speeding through life like a 45 caliber, with a low caliber, demonic scavenger, strapped in the front seat of a dodge challenger.... zooming.

The fires burning, zooming are the people of the world who are flowers, who get devoured in an hour, in this concrete jungle by unrighteous powers and knocked up, then knocked down like twin towers. Remember that Oh, —that past is bitter, that present is spoiled and that future is soiled. Soured by cowards, every minute and every hour, uranium in the cranium, strong as titanium, as we endure plutonium, plutonium showers. We haven’t been the same since the invasion. Plus after 400 years of slavery we still looking for ways to lift the spirits of people whose hell turned into a prison cell... Is these souls worth saving.

Staring into the eyes of death, but of life, they have only gotten a glance. But here comes the boom. The world is a lab. The world filled with a people whose skin colors resemble that of many colors.

The Fires Burning

Raphael

By: Carl Williams

Good Morning Stateville (Belly)

Mess-hall mayhem an inmate
felt disrespected.
Gunshots and mace, got me
vomiting my breakfast--
the most important meal of the day.
I'm food for the beast, it's
the American way.

By: Patrick Pursley
AKA Bilal Shakur

Jail Cell

Come in. We've got company.
I'll lock the door. Let's get close. Closer.

I want you to share everything with me.
I want your outlook as gray as these walls.

I'll bar you from everything you want to grab ahold of.
Feeling blue? Dressed in.

Twos.
Into.

Chow hall.
Back to.

The confines of your inner thoughts.
The ones that say not quite.

Not good enough, not yet.
Wrong time, bad luck, if.

I wish; fuck this shit!
Missed everything there is to miss.

Because I wanted to show you, you always made a difference.
You walked blindly into my arms.

And I hold you down like no other.
In every struggle we snuggle.

We stay together.
We play hate each other.

If someone talks dirty about me you'll clean that shit up
You ain't gonna let no one control me.

Bring your ass back here before the count lights come on.
I see how you look at those other cells.

How do you think that makes me feel?
I gave up.

My life.
So you can have one.

Why do you always want to leave?
What's wrong with me?

Why are you always praying for something better?
Can we get back to that place where we first eyed each other?

We stayed up.
All night!

Do you know how I feel when I watch you sleep?
Like!

Time is officiating a wedding that will make those Disney characters gush.
Every morning.

It's just us.
...Hushed!
You can cry in front of me.

By: Dustin Sherwood

The Yard

The yard, fenced in pseudo freedom
Where my lungs can breathe and
mind can expand. Up, up, in the sky,
a multi-color kite is in flight.

Riding in the strong March wind,
I desire again to feel the quiver of its wings.
The clouds are soft to my hardened eyes.
And the sky is endless and so blue.

I'm hiding again in plain sight.
To the days when I loved my own kite.
High up in the air, in the days
I had so little cares.

Sometimes I wish I were the kite,
and the kite were holding the string,
and I could soar among the clouds,
away from the world and everything.

And then I wish the string would break.
And leave me unfettered in the air.
I don't know where I'd drift to,
But I think I'd like it there.

Scoop me up, I still want to ride.
So I can leave behind the heartache and pain.
Glide on the strong invisible waves,
To new paths I can pave.

Leave behind the earth and all it's worth.
Where human hearts are slaves.
I'm so thankful for this three-hour escapade.
As I slowly walk back to my barbwire cage.

The peace of my thoughts still remains.
While I live day by day, wondering when
I will be free of the restraints of the yard.
Could it be today, tomorrow or next year... I wonder.

By: Lonnie L. Smith

Coming Forth By Day

Cellhouses sit like slave ship
wreckage, but surrounded by
lawns manicured.

The past has caught up with
the present for the shells of men,
ghost interred.

Dreams shattered by haunting
screams, constantly ignored
but undeterred.

The dead have never been louder,
yet their voice never heard.

Pray I break seal, I speak
words of power, my soul doth stir.

By: Patrick Pursley
AKA Bilal Shakur

Dreams of Making Peace with the Swamp

I can't believe I've just awakened in a fucking forest.
Then I hear footsteps, and that's when I decide to run.
Moving as fast as I can, I trip over a twig and fall to the ground
like some blond in a scary movie.
That's when I realize I'm naked.
What do I do next?
How did I get out here?
Who's chasing me?
"What in the fuck do you want from me?!"
I screamed frantically looking around.
"Let me be quiet," I begin to tell myself with eyes bulging like a slave on the run.
How in the fuck did I get in a fucking forest anyway?
Wait! This is a swamp.
I'm knee deep in water with seaweed brushing against me.
Thoughts of how and when I got to this place rambles through my mind
like sounds from drums being beaten by African tribesmen with rage
and I hear water splashing.
Someone is giving chase and is getting closer to me.
On hands and knees now, I crawl as quickly as I can only to come upon
deeper water and my equilibrium is off.
For the first time in my life I am not in control of my own body.
Something terrible is happening to me.
I try again and again to stay afloat, but nothing. I'm drowning.
Physically, I'm becoming weak, mentally I'm becoming drained, and darkness
comes upon the sky and my soul.
I'm being chased down by my own spirit and that's when I decide to
make peace with the swamp.
I fall face forward into the muggy waters and let go.
The salty waters fill my lungs rapidly and I fight while screaming,
regretting my decision and dying, I suddenly awaken in a cold sweat,
blowing tears away from my lips that had leaked from my eyes to
inhale a breath of air.

Making peace with the swamp.

By: Kevin Dugar

Becoming Mentally Free

Becoming mentally free of oppression and depression by learning how to create your very own expression.

Becoming mentally free to open your eyes and really grasp the fascination and wonders on how to exercise your imagination.

Becoming mentally free, that the concept of religion is never allowing yourself or anyone that you care about to be come lost in a false doctrine.

Becoming mentally free teaching yourself how to rise above situations and obtain a clear and positive form of an ideal solution and stepping over misguided conclusions.

Becoming mentally free is the ability that we all possess though a lot of people chose to transgress instead of wanting to progress.

Becoming mentally free is allowing your mind, body and spirit to rise above self-imposed, manmade rules and strive to achieve all your goals.

Becoming mentally free when you file those motions in court and then continue to turn you down, not realizing that each time they knock you to the ground, keeping you physically bound, what is lost can always be found. Just listen to your realistic thoughts and you shall get your sense of becoming mentally free!

By Willie Banks Jr.

Earthly Splendor

Laughter is brightest where food is best served. What is our greatest desire? We can't argue that love is the strongest emotion. Now bring the five senses into the equation, and taste would win hands down.

People love to eat. One common thread that bonds all Americans together, no matter what race, nationality or heritage, is food.

We enjoy gathering for a favorite dish or meal. Just look at the history of our religious communities with all the pastor's dinners, Eid Al-fatrah, Yom Kippur, potlucks, and picnics. Or think of high school or college kids, and how they love to gather in a dorm room or a family room and devour a few pizzas. Furthermore, all the Super Bowl parties, back yard cookouts, wedding receptions, baby showers, and bereavements.

Millions of people go to the movies. What do they eat? Most of them get a bag of popcorn. It's what you do at movies.

Even behind the wall, contemplate what happens after every commissary day, the chow lines get shorter, and the chatter of, "What you go on the meal," rings throughout the cell house. Boiling Hormel alongside some smuggled diced potatoes, Libby Simmerins with Uncle Ben. Aromatic fragrance illuminates the air. Compassionate stewardship brewing in Hell's Kitchen.

Some jailhouse chefs have perfected their skills so much, they could host the Food Network.

Everybody has a food story. Most of them might involve a special family gathering or a favorite dish their mom or grandmother used to make.

Hospitality and food are magical in developing relationships.

Cooking with pride is the passion that fuels most who cater to others. Regardless if it's preparing a large banquet meal at a restaurant or hooking something up for their home boyz in the cell. They have the same pride, enthusiasm, and dedication in their culinary art skills. They find a certain pleasure in it, and joy is increased by spreading it to others.

Universally, the world around can agree: cooking done with care is an act of love.

By: Lonnie L. Smith

Nobody for Somebody (Apropos of A Secret Admirer)

I heard you compliment Jeronimo's cologne,
so I jumped and bought the same kind.

I saw you embrace Henry and like to lost my mind.

You were eating that new spicy chicken sandwich w/ pickles
And I had to taste it because your lips make it look so...
Mmmh.

I hate pickles, but love the things you like. So I love pickles,
And everything pink. New shirts, shoes, flip flop leathers and Kangols w/ the pink feathers.

Did you see me when you walked my way,
And I paused in slow motion w/ Jeronimo's fancy potion?
A pink polo button up top open.
Hoping to get Henry's hug as I stood in awe as you floated by.
Then I looked down in my hand and couldn't understand why?
Why didn't I say, Hi or Hello or something less vapid? Why?
Didn't I fork over the chicken sandwich and spill splendor.
Why do I enjoy watching you live when my infatuation is no
conscience or concern of yours?
Why do I covet more of nothing?

Acknowledgement, affirmation, acceptance.

My engine has blown someone call Tripple 'A'
I'm stranded in the middle of the highway,
No gas No oil, No hybrid battery.

Maybe I just need... A
push.

By: Anthony Spaulding

Ode To Gratitude

I smiled a smile that awoke my face and held it for 20 seconds.
I thought about how fortunate I was just to be able to get up from
the bed that I slept on through the night on my own, oh what a feeling.
I smiled, I yawned, and I began to proceed.

I'm grateful to be alive, I tell myself.
Staggering, I headed to the bathroom to relieve my body of all the toxins
and afterwards realize that I was full of shit.
I stood in the mirror and thought about how grateful I was to have working
bodily functions.

It's like a wave of gratefulness came upon me. Seconds later, I thought for a
moment about all of those people who couldn't relieve themselves of toxins they
had within on their own and let out a sigh of relief.
Damn, I'm grateful.

I hear people say thank you Jesus and others say thank you Lord when
something good or exciting happens to them, but you never see them expressing
gratitude. That is, until Thanksgiving comes around, then all the thanks
in the world could be heard and shared.

I'm grateful for air I inhale, knowing without it I couldn't breathe,
I'm grateful for feeling the wind that blows, though have no clue who
catches the breeze after it hits me and passes me by. I wonder if the air I exhale
gives
life to those little creatures we have no clue exist and if they're grateful for
receiving it.

Gratitude is a good and wonderful thing for those of you who don't know,
but the most important thing to understand is, gratitude is a motherfucker.

By: Kevin Dugar

Secret Indictment

Illinois is the sophisticated, civilized, racist Granddaughter of the sultry, latently evil, coke and petro addict America. Wrongful convictions, gentrification, tainted water; your life'll become prostitutely hoisted within their magnetic magic show.

By: Henry Lovett

The Lamentations of the House of Shakur

Herald unto me my people (Shakur= gratit-)
once more... O Lord, (use to God for)
We cry with sullen (all things, good)
eyes and a heavy heart (and bad, small)
we cry forgive us... (and great)
O Lord.

These are lamentations of the ages
of the House of Shakur,
dedicated to the scribes and sages
who pray, "Forgive us... O, Lord."

In the cradle of civilization stationed
in Theses and Luxor,
the ancients built nations thank
you... O, Lord.

We created science, language,
mathematics, and more.
How did we lose our way?
Forgive us... O, Lord.

From the banks of the Nile, we ruled
with swords and steeds of war.
We took slaves as we built empires,
Forgive us... O, Lord.

We ruled for millennia from Mesopotamia
to Sumner.
The fertile crescent was ours...
Forgive us... O, Lord.

The Hykos, Greeks, and Romans
watched with scorn.
Our dynasties were subject of envy,
forgive them... O, Lord.

Then Alexander and foreign invaders
raided our shores, our libraries,
and lands were rent asunder,
forgive them... O, Lord.

Wave after wave like plagues, they

came like hordes,
locusts, devouring our place,
forgive them... O, Lord.

Good-bye Sumner, good-bye Carthage
and Nubia, you shall be never more,
Our loss is the world's loss, forgive
us all... O, Lord.

I pray thee, let the wisdom of antiquity be restored,
Tie us to the root, long live House
of Shakur... Thank you... O, Lord.

By: Patrick Pursley
AKA Bilal Shakur

What Is Your Game

Are you of the Christian, Muslim, Jewish
Religion; Gnosticism, those with
individual belief producing
a body wholly;

Supporting casts accepting roles
as your names become beams
upholding the structure which remains
your faith, individual, but no
collective of many, produced by one;

Where knee bends and adoration
raises, above all other, with
prejudice producing dogma
barking; the one deemed Holy,
my god, my god; but I cannot
abide totally, but you're a nice thought;

Anyway, attempting to rise above another's station with
desire control over masses caring
nothing for the slaughtered, like
the Pennsylvania shot Amish girls,
five dead, five carrying their wounds,

Still, as Columbine represents no longer
a flower, but slaughtered children
yet to come of age;

Like Sunni Muslims used for
target practice while Saddam readies
for America's attack,
justifying his actions holy
to the world;

Or desiring riches and
Machiavelli's thoughts,
wanting to be like the Rothschilds
whose banking prowess has sold
out America, dream;
while watching our children
not theirs,
being gunned down on the streets;

While politically sacrosanct programs
fake-the-fake
hand-off, one crack-pot scheme
after another, stealing the American dollar;

Lost to the Chinese Yen,
European Euro,
chasing a dream you think
attainable;

Maybe, in the pen
ten, twenty, thirty,
years gone by,
you now look to the sky
and pray to your creator
for;

Mercy, Marvin Gaye song
but did anyone list;
what is your game?

By: Patrick Palaggi

I Am A Man!

I'm a man,
And I've bled for these United States in times of war,
I even scarified my own life but never kept score.

I'm a man and I come in all shapes and sizes,
Black, White, and Candy Stripe alike.

I'm a man who's been bit and even been the
receptacle of another human's spit, while I sit,
Ain't that some shit!!!!

I'm a man, and I am what I am, nobody can change
that fact, yet I'm still treated like anything but a man
and a complete human being till this very day.

I'm a man who didn't ask to be stolen to this Godforsaken land and through it
all I'm still
strong and here I stand simply that I am, I am
a man!

By: The Poet

AUTHORS' STATEMENTS

The Poet

My name is Antonio Balderas. I was born and raised in Chicago, IL. My mother Ruth Ann Fletcher was born in Mississippi. My father Jose Balderas, who wed my mother and was born in West Virginia, was a child of mixed parents as I became also. My family ancestry influenced my life greatly by fully exposing me to different cultures, including, but not limited to, my own family members. I started reading poetry and eventually writing it after I read a poem by Paul L. Dunbar. I was inspired to learn that a Black person could write so well.

My style of poetry uses rhyme a lot. I use this choice of style because it helps me form the different line breaks and stanzas.

Writing poetry has allowed me to view places I never could travel to on my own. I believe we're all connected, whether we're Black, White, or Candy Stripe, so I write to add color to all the flavor of people of this world.

Cedric X Cal

My poetry reflects speaking truth to power, raising the level of consciousness of humanity, by freeing them from the disinformation of corporate media. I believe reading my poems will lead the reader to be informed and have mixed feelings due to controversial subjects. It also opposes the prevailing pop culture that is leading to the demise of society. It's "edu-tainment." So "every poem is an opportunity to destroy my career."

Kevin Dugar

After sitting alone to collect my thoughts one day, my mind starts to recall all the peaceful days I had when I once was a young boy. Not knowing how to express myself verbally and explain my inner thoughts back then was heart-wrenching until my grammar school teacher suggested I start writing a journal to myself.

All the experiences, people, and places I'd seen in my life was an easy story to tell, so I wrote and my words flowed onto paper like butter. I made it a priority to let

my peers see the world through the vision of my eyes so they could experience the journey this 36-year-old man from a poverty-stricken neighborhood went through. I've cried a million tears or more over the years and till this day water still leaks from the eyes of a man who only needed an opportunity to be taught by someone who really cares about the people no matter their skin color or gender. I write to put smiles on faces, I write to escape, and most of all I write so you, the people, can have a clear picture that I am somebody.

Thank you.

Cornelius Lewis

It was necessary for me to extend my poem Adolescent Anger and provide a different and more positive perspective for the youngster to re-evaluate his choices. He can now channel his anger in a more positive direction.

HENRY LOVETT

Henry Terriell Lovett is from the South Side of Chicago, IL. After many years spent appreciating various forms of art, he committed himself to become a relevant creator. He appreciates all art forms: paintings, music, movies dance culinary, poetry, drama, architecture and nature itself (to name a few). With an eye towards defying the rules of art's edicts, as an artist, Mr. Lovett can't be limited to a genre, methodology or medium. He incorporates an idea into the platform most suitable to express the full thought. We now look back on the ancient Egyptian monuments, stolen art still being recovered from the Holocaust era and the native American cave paintings and Mayan tribal tattoo art; Henry Lovett hopes to reach these levels of long-lasting impact in his creations. Henry Lovett creates: paintings, pencil drawings, poetry, songs, non-fiction short stories, fictional novels, video game concepts and photography. Some of the elements contained in Mr. Lovett's art are: Political Science, street knowledge, psychology, common sense, race relations, book smarts, popular culture, and history, all of which are used with the full authority of a layman. This world-renowned artist is a man of the people and his art reflects a love of the people.

Patrick Palaggi

Writing is about self-expression—that which lives beneath the heart, what is in one's soul. I desire, for anyone who would read my work, to see what is in my soul; I want them to see me, not another's image of me. You must go to the source of the fountain to find the truth about anything. How I view life, of any given situation, will be found in my writing. This is why I love poetry, why it has become so important to me; because I have finally found the words to speak.

Patrick Pursley

I am a walking contradiction, and in my poetry the opposing ideals that reside in my mind do battle on paper, line by line.

In one rhyme I might write about mass incarceration of black men and racism, while in another poem I might flip it on you, and embrace the stereotypes and taboos.

I collide the imagery of the sacred and the profane, the dark and the light purposefully just to make the readers squirm in their seats.

I am completely comfortable with uncomfortable topics.

Let political correctness forever be banished! I am a misfit whose poetry is not meant to be taken too seriously.

My poetry is not just an expression of my individuality, but a glimpse into humanity's undivided duality.

My ideas reside in the crevice between the infinite and the finite.

Words are a sacred source of power. I use them for just ends, and at times my rhymes are just silly because no matter what trials life throws at you, you must maintain your sense of humor by all means necessary.

Dustin Sherwood

My first line or title is pulled out the air from a conversation like it's audible bold print. It's my headline, to start writing. The ideas race against my penmanship like competing networks with Breaking News. I write until thoughts slow like water from a just shut off hose. The personal is always harder to write, even when I'm vague. My writing is a really small mirror revealing an area of myself. No matter who I'm writing about, the reader can always see reflections of me sitting Indian style on the page.

I'm heavily influenced, bent off that golden era of Hip-Hop. Storytelling that seems as if it has its own baseline, profane proverbs resonating like lows in digital drum kits. The less I curse in my daily speech the more I search for whole sentences to replace one bad word, never forgetting the gravity of a well-positioned motherfucker!

Lonnie L. Smith

I use poetry as a vehicle to convey my innermost thoughts and my journey through life. Though my vessel is captured, my mind is free to soar as far as my dreams will take me. One of the reasons we read poetry is to have a love affair with language, and to determine how close we may be to others, by taking in their life experiences and moods. It's a worthy exercise. Poets mold and shape by planting seeds that grow within us. I love to write because it satisfies my passion to create. The misfortune of being alone birthed a blessing of coming to know myself for the first time. My writing stems from my desire to know, understand and share the who, what and why am I with those who have never seen the person I am within. I write about feelings: my heart words. Words you can't speak in conversation. You can tell a person something a thousand times, and she hears you once. But if you write it once, she can read it a thousand times, until she understands. To me, poetry is timeless.

Anthony M. Spaulding

My previous publications *Distractions* (youth self-help book), *It's Not Your Fault!* (poetry/song/play comforting abuse victims) and *Descendant of David* (spiritually based poetry/song/play) laid the foundation. My legendary creative writing teacher, Dr. Margaret Burrows, provided credibility to attract customers. I fought writing lovey and sweetie for so long because I was never in love. I hated everything and everybody, including myself.

I hope the reader looks at the people surrounding them and think about the effect they have on others unknowingly. If someone can love you and you know nothing, then it could be possible for someone to despise you. Will you pick up on those small observances? Are you bold enough to ask questions and force confession? Are you ready for the answer? I hope these pieces will attract a response, and create a confidence to make a connection. Love Eternal.

Raphael Carl Williams

I'm one who expresses myself with my poetry through life examples, historical information mixed with political criticism and support for class struggle. By using words that build images and point out social issues of the past and present, my poetry is my journey. It allows me to critique what future influences may be like through the eyes of information. I'm a free expressionist and my writings flow freely from the creative ideas of my mind and heart. As a poet, I write poems that capture and express the deeper truths about an individual, place or thing. And as a writer, I like to emphasize my intellect, projecting truth and wisdom, so that when you hear it, you can visualize it through its creative acts.

Carl Williams
Raphael

Clifton Young

Most of my poems have hidden messages in them. Many stem from past experiences, new goals that I'm trying to reach or trials and tribulations that may have affected me in some type of way. I like to write from a positive aspect, because in some strange way, I'm trying to reach someone. Hopefully they can take something out of my poems, that they can use. I'm from the streets, so I understand people from the streets, I talk their language, I feel their pain, and I understand their struggles. Right now I'm working with a non-profit organization call Rage, an acronym for Resident Association of Greater Englewood, in my hood—born and raised. We do a lot of things for the youth in our community. My job is to write to them, poem, raps, and letters telling my story the best way that I know how. My brother Tyree reads each piece of work to them, so I have to be careful of the things I say because I'm trying to save lives and maybe put a bit back that I took from my hood. So, P+NAP has been a great blessing to me, because I have learned so much—all the different poets and styles I now use to make me a better poet, a better writer. I am mainly influenced by all the guys in my poetry class; each person has their own style, their own way of expressing themselves, and still getting a great message across. I have to bring it, because I know that they're going to put their best foot forward, each and every time that we write. So I want to take this time to thank each and every one for all that's been rendered, inspired me, and accepted me as part of your poetry class.

