

**BRO-  
KEN  
SIL-  
ENCE**

*Writing from NYU's  
Prison Education Program  
Summer 2017*

*To you who may mentally consume our broken silence,*

**PLEASE! TAKE TIME TO VISUALIZE OUR UNCONFINED MINDS. OUR UNTAMED THOUGHTS AND VERBAL ONSLAUGHTS THAT PAINT VIVID PICTURES FROM OUR TEMPORARY HALT IN TIME. FOR WE FINALLY SPEAK...NOT OF RAGE, BUT UNCAGED PEACE FROM A DISDAINED CREEK. HEAR US! THROUGH PENS RELEASED ON LINED SHEETS. WE ASK THAT YOU FEEL THESE EMBEDDED, POETIC AESTHETIC, AND DRAMATIC WORDS INKED. FEEL US! SOME OF THE PAIN WE STAINED. SOME OF THE LOVE WE SHED. SOME OF THE TEARS WE RAIN. WE CONTAIN JUST AS MUCH, BUT A BIT OF US IN THIS. SO DON'T BE SHY, TAKE YOUR TIME, BE ROBUST WITH THIS. LET IT FLOW LIKE SLOW CURRENTS UNTIL YOU ARE TOUCHED AND... CLUTCHED WITH A RUSH, FROM OUR ONCE SEALED LIPS...THIS IS *BROKEN SILENCE*.**

**DAYSHAWN GILLIAM AKA J VIVID**



*Back row, from left: Keith Golden, Simeon De'Lesline, Derick McCarthy, Dayshawn Gilliam, Gregory Terrell Headley, Shaquan Hinds, Vincent Thompson, R. Sirius Gordon, Torey Jenkins, Ori Johnson.*

*Front row, from left: Willie Williams, Omar Walker, Miles Lewis.*

*Photograph by Raechel Bosch.*

# BROKEN SILENCE

*Broken Silence* was written and edited in a Summer 2017 elective course at Wallkill Correctional Facility and produced by the Gallatin Writing Program.

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*\*Inspired by “invasive species self-questionnaire”  
by Marwa Helal*

*\*\*Excerpted from an exchange of questions and  
answers between students at Wallkill and students at  
Washington Square*

*To those who never stopped believing in us*

# SELF-QUESTIONNAIRE

## THE INTERROGATION OF THE BLACK MAN VINCENT THOMPSON

### **WHERE DOES FREEDOM BEGIN?**

Not sure where it begins, but I know where it ended. When they pushed my ancestors through the door of “No Return” and placed them on those ships.

### **AFRICAN OR AMERICAN?**

That’s like choosing between a child that’s been kidnapped and a child that’s been abused.

### **NIGGER OR NIGGA?**

Depends.

### **ON WHAT?**

On who you ask. In my neighborhood, it means brother. Around older or more intellectual brothers it a forbidden word.

### **IMMIGRANT OR CITIZEN?**

Neither, a prisoner.

### **CRIMINAL OR THUG?**

Why not scholar or intellectual?

### **HOLD ON; WHO IS SUPPOSED TO BE ANSWERING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE?**

I am, but why does it feel like an interrogation?

### **HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED?**

As a person who experienced failures in life but had the resilience to succeed.

### **WHAT IS SUCCESS?**

To chase, to grab what you want.  
To win.

### **WHAT IF YOU LOSE?**

In this country, as a Black man, I would not be the first.

### **WOULD YOU RATHER GO TO SYRIA, SOMALIA, OR LIBYA?**

I want the justice and liberty that this country preach.

### **JUSTICE OR LIBERTY?**

Is this really a question?

### **ONLY IN AMERICA.**

My point exactly.

# D. E. A. D.

## DETERMINATION ENDED AS DISCRIMINATION KENNETH HARDEN-SMITH AKA S.U.P.R.STAR YU

It's amazing of the different faces, as  
a one man show of a specific quote turned out to display a note,

Determination ended as discrimination because of the ancient favoritism.

Though also speaking of the now and living, no motivation can lead a person to  
becoming let down.

As that person is drowned in low self-esteem and doubt,

Portraying the opposite is when the mind splits, depicting a darkened image,  
suddenly projecting a gloomy sight of a mirage.

As the doors open then close to this sacred garage,

To be dead is said to inherit the forever perish,

As a perishable thus gave up determination of pursuit that is now locked  
in the basement.

Because of a natural bio cover to be the same color as the pavement, doubt is  
conversed with shame and hurt,

As near thunder erupts shattering pouring out plunder, while the mind ravel and  
wonders off into the distance.

For instance a mission at any given instant is not being trapped in a coffin, yelling  
and squealing for the ceiling to unveil.

The thrill that is overcome when prevailing, as a near-death experience made it  
possible for an out-of-body experience.

Where the nefarious doesn't conquer, as his soul outlives the mischief,

Then the body diminishes in snippets while continuing to pivot toward a far-fetched  
mental-equipped distance.

Envisioning a renaissance impacted by immortal plots...as motivation is dotted  
annihilating discrimination.

# WASHINGTON SQUARE TO WALK KILL

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*What would you like the world to know about you and your  
life experiences?*

*What would you like the world to know about you and your life experiences?*

**DENNIS:** My life experience is an open book, and I'd hope that from my experiences, lessons could be learned and questions could be answered.

**VINCENT:** I want the world to know that I am human just like them. I made mistakes in my life, but I learned from each one of them. This is what makes me the person I am today.

**WILLIE:** I am 28 years old. I was born in July. I am a very outgoing person. I love to be educated and to educate others as well. I had a pretty rough childhood. I have been shot, gotten caught with guns, and been to jail quite a few times. I grew up with many insecurities that I still live with today, and because of those insecurities, I don't speak in class; I hold all my thoughts to myself unless I am putting them on paper. Then, I can express myself more freely. I am motivated by love. I am very kindhearted and will give my last to anyone in need. I am a very loyal individual, and I always want the same back. I have been broken-hearted many times. I made many mistakes because I always wanted to be recognized and have people's approval. Now, I have learned that I am my own man, and I

am worth more than what I thought of myself in the past. I still have many insecurities to work on, and hopefully someone will soon like me for me. Ask whatever, and I will always be honest with you.

**SHAQUAN:** I would like the world to know that I am not just a criminal. That I am a smart young man who has made poor choices due to my ignorance in life.

**MILES:** On July 20, 2008, a knock on my door ultimately led to a term of 12.5 years in prison—a numbing sense of powerlessness for my future. I was given an excessive sentence due to my past. In this twisted sense of karma, I feel that the world punished me for bad decisions leading up to that date. During this time, a multitude of life trials and moral battles have presented themselves. Through these struggles that have manifested themselves over the years, I have learned to take charge of the things I have control over and use them to push myself in the right direction. Self-growth and improvement have helped me to develop marketable skills that will secure me a positive place in society upon my release.

**OMAR:** I think the world should know that we have something to offer in society, and we are not all monsters that deserve to be treated as such from the way the criminal punishment system depicts us to be. We bring real-life experience to a side of America that a lot of people do not even notice or are unaware of. Most importantly, we can learn from each other's experience to make our country a better place.

**KEITH:** That despite some poor choices, every individual is extremely unique in some way.

**R. SIRUS:** I'm learning on a daily basis to embrace the good as well as the bad in a productive way. To go past the limits of what it means to love myself while arduously working to become my "better self."

**DERICK:** That I am not a victim of a bad background or a poverty-stricken neighborhood. That my parents were not drug addicts, and I did not have to commit crimes to survive. I was not influenced by my peers, movies, or rap music. I made poor choices on my own, going against all the values my family had instilled in me since

birth. I have encountered things in here that are not shown on a TV show or a movie. People aren't getting raped in here, and every tough guy is not engaging in homosexual activities. For the most part, jail is a homophobic environment. The hardest part of doing this time is not worrying about the ongoing violence around me and will I become a casualty of it. I wasn't worrying, *What will happen if I drop the soap in the shower?* I wasn't worried about having to pay rent to use the phone. The hardest part of doing this time was being away from my family. It was being away from those who love me. It was missing some of the most important moments in their lives. It was not being there for my younger siblings when they needed me. I did my crime and did my time. I am NOT coming back.

# 1 (THE LONELIEST #)

DERICK MCCARTHY

i sit in central bookings  
ppl packed wall 2 wall  
i feel so lonely

my lawyer & d.a. talk  
while the judge listens  
the audience stares  
i feel so lonely

the bus is crowded  
handcuffed 2 another person  
i feel so lonely

evryone has 2 fit  
b4 they can close the bullpen gate  
there is nowhere 2 sit  
i feel so lonely

the mess hall is full  
ppl always come when its chicken  
i feel so lonely

the bathrooms r nvr empty  
whats privacy  
its a party  
i feel so lonely

lights out i cant sleep  
snores r keeping me up  
i feel so lonely

few leave  
many come back  
i always stay  
i feel so lonely

@ the visit room w/ my gf  
xoxo  
i feel so lonely

i call evryone  
phone calls go by fast  
we miss u they all say  
i feel so lonely

12 ppl judge me  
they dont know me  
i feel so lonely

25 2 life  
his familys clapping  
my familys crying  
i feel so lonely

*Author's note: "1 (the loneliest #)" is based on my experiences while being held in Rikers Island Detention Center for three and a half years. I wrote it in text-message shorthand to reflect how much has changed in society the 13 years I have been in prison, even the way the English language is written.*

# WONDER

SIMEON DE'LESLINE

"Love," when it's real there's no limits to its depths

"Love," when it's fake the pain is endless...

Past mistakes make people feel like they got the right to judge you

Even when you catch on, do right, they anticipate your fumble

Say only God can judge you, yet people still passing judgment

And these are the ones that say they love you

Want nothing but good for you...

They watch you slip up and fall, applauding telling you to get up

But when you get up they pray to see you stumble

A headstone with manicured lawns, with leaves huddled, with me under

Is that what they want? Sometimes I sit back and wonder...

Deaf man asked the blind man, "Can you see death coming?"

He said, "No, but I can hear it coming off the lips of my loved ones..."

Anger provokes truth, but the proof isn't always valid

Like the worm vs. the eagle, our truths have different views

...A headstone, with manicured lawns, with leaves huddled, with me under

Is that what they want? Sometimes I sit back and wonder

# LETTER TO MY NEWBORN

KEITH GOLDEN

I was there to hear your first heartbeat,

Played a crucial part to how you were conceived,

*Will you look like her?*

*Will you look like me?*

While your mother was pregnant we stayed in some beef,

To see your first smile,

To hear your first cry...

Damn, why'd I choose a life of crime.

Not being there for you and Mommy hurt me a lot,

Just know Daddy did it all to keep food in the pot

Make sure you are taken care of I will always do—

Diapers, strollers, crib, and car seats,

I made it happen for you

*Will the good outweigh the bad?*

I wasn't there for your birth,

So will you really know your dad?

Mommy's all alone now,

*Will she be able to give you all her love and still hold you down?*

I'll probably miss your first walk, crawl, your first sounds

Just know Daddy loves you forever and a day,

And in a year from now all these questions will go away.

With unconditional love,

Love,

Daddy...

# I CAN'T IMAGINE

## TOREY JENKINS

I can't imagine a day  
without your charming smile  
Nor can I justly convey  
how much I love your style

I can't imagine a week  
without your warm embrace  
Nor the absence of your pleasing form  
and lovely flawless face

I can't imagine a year  
without you near to share  
the times that do endear  
or other moments of despair

I can't imagine a lifetime  
without you by my side  
for I want a love divine  
I need you as my guide

I can't imagine eternity  
without the love I've known  
My spirit would wander hopelessly  
In agony—Alone

# WALK KILL TO WASHINGTON SQUARE

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*What are your views on incarcerated people? How has the media influenced your views?*

*What are your views on the criminal punishment system?*

*What are your views on incarcerated people? How has the media influenced your views?*

**NYELAH:** I don't think I have defined notions about people who are incarcerated, and in terms of the media (with some exceptions), it feels like the whole point is to not view incarcerated people as individual people. There have been a lot of efforts recently to combat that and to educate people about criminalization in America—the school-to-prison-pipeline, mass incarceration, etc. My dad used to do a lot of work with that, so when I was in high school, we had a lot of conversations around incarceration, and people are still learning. A lot of those conversations are highlighted by discussions of race and criminalization. Drug offenses have been an eye-opener, especially since being in school. I have no idea what the actual statistics are on people who do drugs in college, but I'm guessing it's really high. In terms of the media, I think my general takeaway has to do more with the act of criminalizing or dehumanizing a people. I've seen Black people murdered on television (on the news) over and over and over again. We don't see anybody else die though. When I think

about people who are incarcerated, I try to imagine individual people with empathy. My cousin is still incarcerated, set to be released around the time that I graduate. He was really weird growing up, and he lived with my family for a bit when I was younger. I'm the oldest sibling, but he's probably about six years older than me, so the whole dynamic shifted when he came. He used to get jumped a lot, and he had purple glasses that he called "blurple" instead. I think about him mostly.

**KEYLI:** I have met a few people that have been in prison, and at the end of the day, these people are people just like everyone else. None of us are perfect, and we all make mistakes, but it's hard for me to say I have certain views on incarcerated people when everyone is different. I do have views on the criminal system in this country though. The United States has had a problem with mass incarceration for quite some time now, and I think this is an issue that we should be trying to solve as a nation.

**GEORGINA:** The notions I have are that incarcerated people most likely did something illegal and probably have a low quality of day-to-day life. Beyond that, it's difficult to make generalizations. I'm sure you find every type of person in prison. I don't think all crimes are bad nor are "criminals" necessarily bad people. I think journalism has actually led me to these beliefs. I listen to a lot of radio, and I heard part of reporter Shane Bauer's account as a prison guard in a Corrections Corporation of America facility. He worked for four months undercover and illuminated the terrible conditions within. I realized that the absurd dynamics of a prison shape people's behaviors, perhaps prompting them to act out of character. Bauer admits he did things he didn't expect. So if someone who didn't commit any crimes finds himself becoming aggressive, what can you expect for the people serving time? Another important segment that has shaped my views about incarceration is an

episode of the podcast *Invisibilia*, "The Personality Myth." The episode discusses how people can change, using the example of someone incarcerated for a violent crime. I think it's really important to take people at face value and hope the choices they made in the past do not reflect who they are today.

*What are your views on the criminal punishment system?*

**KYLE:** In the United States, the criminal justice system pins “danger” on certain individuals in order to recompense the American conscience for larger, more systemic tragedies—ones that are usually caused by “free,” powerful people in institutions of law, education, work, etc. This obviously doesn’t work and will perpetuate itself if we continue to believe it does.

**JUN:** I believe the criminal justice system has become, to a certain extent, a strategic political weapon and a tool for the prison-industrial complex. I think that a system of punishment, where fair, and a commensurate system of rehabilitation would serve society well, but the reality is far from ideals of fairness and equality.

**QUANDA:** The criminal punishment system has become a warehousing of Black and Brown male and female youth who, due to the constraints placed on them due to residential location, challenged home life, and lack of options, find themselves constantly on the margins of “accepted” society. These youth, once placed in the system, become invisible. There is little to no access to programs of true rehabilitation. There is little to no access to mentors and persons who have the welfare of the incarcerated truly at heart.

## TO FREEDOM

### DENNIS “HOLLYWOOD” BAILER

I know I didn't treat you right  
Now you're the reason why I don't sleep at night  
Your significance abused I must've lost sight  
Of what you really meant to me  
Should have treated you more gently  
I simply fell victim to the sin that was tempting me  
Curse the strip clubs and girls with nice bums  
Curse the customers that purchase lump sums  
Curse my misdirection I don't know where it came from  
No more preaching about bankrolls, bottles, and models  
You're what I praise, nevermore will I follow that motto  
Place all the time in the world in the void you create and it will still be hollow  
The pain without you is severe, I barely manage the damage  
And you should never be taken for granted  
You weren't supposed to be mine that's how others had planned it  
Ancient ones died for you and you're what I fight for  
You're what I strive for  
Be great and do right for  
Now because of your omission  
I am on a mission  
To use my intuition to never again be in this position  
I'm focused now more than ever  
Listening to those who know we were meant to be together  
Until we're parted by death, for worse or better  
Reminiscing of how I was such a buffoon  
Realizing if I don't treat you with love then I'm destined for doom  
Ashamed I am for the disloyalty I proved  
Reconcile I will, trust I'll be with you soon

# THE PARALLAX VIEW

## OMAR WALKER

**I**n the middle of the summer, a young boy out in the projects, breaking laws that can lead to his incarceration. Living in a concentrated community with limited opportunities, lack of quality education, and negative allurements has given the boy false hope of a better tomorrow. Which compels the boy to not care about his actions and who they affect because he does not know anything else. He actually believes there is nothing wrong with the norms of his community. I mean, he feels certain things are not right—because of the feeling he used to get from seeing his parents getting high on drugs, among other unhealthy actions—and the lifestyle is risky, but he believes that selling drugs and doing extremely dangerous things for money is necessary to make a better life for himself.

*A hot, sunny, and humid morning.* Him and his boys occupy the kids playground—gambling, smoking weed, drinking liquor, and selling drugs—unaware of the impact these negative activities are having on the younger kids. As the elders witness with disgust and heartbreak from their ignorance, knowing that him and his boys' behaviors shall lead to their imprisonment. This is nothing new that the elders have witnessed; it is just a new generation being sucked into the repetitive cycle that destroys lives in urban communities.

Well, him and his boys are having a wonderful time, playing cards for money while not thinking of and having no plans for the future. I mean, he envisions a better life to be had from television, but he has no formula to accomplish it. He is out in the streets wasting time and taking it for granted. He is talking shit to his boys because of a few games won back-to-back, and, on top of the influence of weed and liquor in his system, that has him feeling good about himself. So, one of his boys tells him, “Don’t get so cocky, because that can be your downfall; it’s best to be humble.” The boy says, “You’re just hating because you are losing. Stop being a sore loser.”

At this time, his boy, who is a little older and has been through much more, feels that it is the perfect time to share some knowledge on life from his experiences, hoping that the young boy would take heed to it. His boy says, "I've done two state sentences because of my cockiness. I felt I was untouchable. I was making a whole lot of money out here and not watching or analyzing my moves. Most importantly, I was not worrying about or planning for my future, while the government already had plans for it. Prison is no joke, and I don't have any more time for them to even put on the handcuffs. No mistaken identity or nothing, I'm done with the lifestyle. The risk is far greater than the reward."

The boy becomes defensive from the advice because he does not understand the unfamiliar language, and it feels as if he is being attacked for feeling good about himself. The boy responds in a resistive way, "That's all good and everything, but I can do five years, come out, and still be on top of my game." It was obvious to his boy that he was not receiving the message. His boy has done two state prison sentences that took a whole lot of time out his life. He did one, came home, and within a year, got caught again and went back upstate to do more time. This time, he came home with a plan to be successful out in society without the risk of going back to prison. He works, takes care of his family, and on occasion, hangs out with the boys to drop some jewels on them because he knows what the lifestyle leads to: prison or the graveyard. He saw something in the boy that the boy did not see in himself. The boy's name is Omar Walker.

## CYNICAL MIND

### SHAQUAN HINDS

December 31st, her legs hurt the worst / The year was '89 her pain was reimbursed / Last birth in the greatest drug era produced a cold heart probably thru the frost weather / Mother gone which made Lesley the go-getter / Also mom at heart but earn my own cheddar / This child defense mechanism no better / Soul was so bitter appreciation won't give her / Blood family hated me cause I moved different / Black sheep turned a wolf when the snow hit him / Cocaine paint the lines of my whole vision / Turned dreams to reality to more missions / Four-fifth him, cold blisters till the tip hit him / Temperature changing, like Icy Hot rubbed in him / I ain't trying to go to jail so I'm so gone / Hear them sirens blazing so I get my bolt on / Imprisonment cocoon came out like a butterfly / Gone in the wind I watch them sleep like a lullaby / Changing the world are the thoughts mind occupies / Product of my environment but my desires driven like the president / With no regards my wrath will spark my hidden thoughts / For battles fought with priceless lost my voice will roar / Some consider me a dark angel with no soul / but they don't understand what they don't know / So I leave them in the dark because they can't see the light I am striving for.

# STARVIN

DAYSHAWN GILLIAM AKA J VIVID

Starvin!!!

Ready to cave in.

Momma been gone two days—AGAIN

—to catch a cravin from them hallway guys.

She always leavin; nothing new to me,

Except the roaches are getting deeper,

Startin to crawl all on the toilet seater,

Causing me to CREEP-OUT and get DOOKIE on the back of my sneaker...

Maaan, I'm only eight!

I thought school was rough, but this is getting worse to plate.

Been THINKIN bout that foster place Momma scare me with.

Where she say, if I keep beggin, she gonna curb me quick.

What if it's BETTER than this? What if it's the LOVE that I miss?

Starvin for something different.

Momma to be MORE PERSISTENT in loving me more than she isn't.

I'm starvin!!!

Tired of carving *I hate you* under the drawer of my undergarments!

Tired of sitting on the floor...

Staring at the BACK OF THE DOOR to our apartment.

Hopin that every set of keys I hear is yours, to come RELIEVE me from this darkness.

MOMMA, I'm starvin for you...

Yesterday I stole a bag of apples from the supermarket—FOR YOU.

I REMEMBER those DEMONS you told me you faced.

So I took my school pencils (Sorry, Momma!), ditched the erasers.

Sharpened both ends and stashed them up in my pilliow-caser

ready to fend off YOUR LIL DEMON CHASER!

But, MA, I'm getting tired...

"Be right back" done EXPIRED, and I'm ready to cave in.

You SHOULD be here with me.

Cookies and fudge cakes WE makin when the foodstamps make it.

But they DIDN'T make it.

I don't think I can go one more day WITHOUT YOU, Momma,

without deterioratin.

I'm tryna be...

PATIENT...!

But I'm STARVIN FOR YOU!!!

# PERCEPTION

GREGORY TERRELL HEADLEY

## WHERE DOES FREEDOM BEGIN?

In my mind, at birth, in school, once I am released from prison...the prison of my mind, closing in...suffocating... my...thoughts...

## AM I BREATHING?

Air fills my lungs (inhale), effortlessly (exhale), feeding my blood stream... without thought...without fail.

## WILL I BREATHE AGAIN?

Organized thoughts, unorganized world. Perfect harmonic chaos... beauty?

## WHY CONCENTRATE?

The lungs do not, the nerves do not. The answer is checked off on living billboards walking through fleshy utopias advertising free will. Just do it!

## BREADTH OR BREATH?

The distance from where I began versus the distance as I move from the critics and their criticisms, the cynics and their cynicism, the stereotypes that surround me.

## BLACK OR HUMAN?

Tell me the difference! King or slave, knight or knave. Authority figures acting up yet telling others how to behave.

## NIGGER OR NIGGA?

I am neither. Yet my friends use it as a term of endearment while others utilize the term in hate. "Yo my nigga what's hood?" "Yo Nigger, you in the wrong hood!"

## AM I WHAT YOU SAY I AM OR WHAT I SAY I AM?

"You descended from slaves." "We are born of kings."

You are; I am; we be reflections of each other...perfectly imperfect...sisters from another mister...brothers from another mother.

# WASHINGTON SQUARE TO WALK KILL

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*What kind of reforms do you think the criminal justice system could use?*

*What kind of reforms do you think the criminal justice system could use?*

**DERICK:** In order to reform the criminal justice system, you have to start from the ground up. You must retrain police officers to not fear Black people. This fear is caused by unjust assumptions and biases that are perpetuated by the media, purposely and unintentionally, that the Black man is dangerous. The truth of the matter is that a police officer is more likely to get shot or killed by a White person. When you examine individuals from the same types of neighborhoods, with the same levels of incomes and same circumstances, White people commit crimes at a higher rate than Black people. From lower class to upper class. You must also fire all the judges and district attorneys and start fresh with individuals who are not jaded by past experiences and are willing to give each situation its own results.

**OMAR:** Well, as you are aware, our criminal justice system is totally broken, and there is urgent need for some reforms. The reform of our criminal justice system starts with the District Attorney (DA) because the DA is the

person that decides whether or not to arraign an individual who has been accused of a crime. And the more convictions that they have under their belt, the more it seems as if they are doing their job. Not caring whether the case goes further than an individual doing some community service, paying a fine, or giving that individual the desperate help that he or she needs. The reform needs to be on how society judges the way a DA does their job because all it does now is encourage them to buckle down to get as many convictions as possible while they're in the position to do so. This hurts the justice system because it destroys the lives of a lot of people based on their childish mistakes.

**VINCENT:** The process of reforming our criminal justice system could start with eliminating the power of money in the court system. The amount of money a person has should not determine the skillset of their lawyer. This puts individuals that are poverty stricken at a disadvantage with incompetent lawyers. The bail system also revolves around

money; a person that has financial ability to post bail has the advantage in building their defense by having access to more resources than a person that is in jail. Therefore, if a person does not have access to money to post a bail, the system puts them at a disadvantage to build a stronger defense against the criminal charges they are facing. When human lives are at stake, money should not hold this much power.

**DENNIS:** We need a system that understands the needs of the people. Not all "criminals" deserve jail time. Some need mental help, or other kinds of rehab. People in prison need training other than as laborers.

**TOREY:** I think nonviolent offenders should not receive such harsh and long sentences. And I believe there should be more programs geared toward reentry. I also believe those who commit rape and molest kids should get more time. I think it's crazy that you can get more time for a nonviolent drug offense than you get for molesting a child or raping a woman.

**MILES:** More therapeutic programs, self-help programs, more drug and alcohol programs. Programs about real-life issues for the inmate's family on the outside. For example, improved parenting classes to show a decent way to communicate with your children. Furthermore, educational courses for everybody. Healthier nutrition and diet. Enhancements to help transition from incarceration to society.

# **DISTRESS BY THE BLUE SUIT**

## **MILES LEWIS**

**W**hy am I fearful of the people in blue uniforms? As a child I was not fortunate enough to have nice clothes. My first dealing with a man in a blue suit was when I stole a pair of jeans from a department store called Macy's. I assumed I was being very cautious. I looked around the store to make sure that no one was watching me, and then I lifted up my jacket, grabbed a pair of new jeans, and stuffed them in the front of my pants. On very weak legs, I slowly walked toward the exit of the store. My heart was beating violently, sweat started to spill down from my forehead onto my face as I ran down the two flights of stairs of the store. I took three steps at a time, my heartbeat started to relax, my nerves finally unraveled when I heard a voice.

"Hey you, kid, come back here!"

My conscience was telling me to turn around and that there was someone, possibly security, calling me from the store. I already knew about being punished if I got caught. I took off running, as fast as I could, pumping my legs and arms with as much force as my eight-year-old body could deliver. My heart was pounding again, loud enough to hear it in my ears, and so strong I thought it would tear through my chest. I was frightened, and I wished that I had never stolen those jeans, wished that I had not been foolish enough to put myself in this position.

I could feel this 200-pound man in the blue suit breathing heavy on the back of my neck while pointing and shouting for me to stop. The shoppers were staring at us, wondering what was going on. I pulled the jeans out of my coat and whipped them across the marble floor of the mall area I was running through, and they slid under a plastic orange chair at a white table in the corner. I hoped this act would catch attention as a diversion and stop him from his pursuit, and also prevent him from retrieving the evidence. No, he had the taste of blood in his mouth. He kept chasing me, even though I threw the jeans. What he wanted was the person who stole from his department store. He did not care about the jeans anymore.

Just as I was hit with the realization, I felt a hard, heavy hand come crashing upon my back. He yanked me backward. My feet, still scrambling forward, slipped out from under me, and I landed on the floor. He dragged me back to the store and tossed me in the inventory room, where he kept me for two long hours, interrogating me as if I were a career criminal. He yelled at me, scaring me, this giant man in the blue security-guard blazer with a plastic badge and big metal flashlight pointing at me. He made me cry, told me that I would be going to jail forever for what I had done, and I believed him with his serious face. I thought I would never see my family again, and I hated him for those words. But I hated myself more, and I told myself if I ever got out of this, if I ever regained my freedom, I would never make such a mistake again. I would stay clear of anything that could place me in any type of jeopardy with any individual with authority, because once they have something against you, they can do whatever they want and be justified in doing it.

Finally, he let me go. I ran through the shopping mall, stopping only long enough to see if the new name-brand jeans I had tossed happened to still be under the bright orange chair, on the floor, in the corner. I felt I deserved them for all the torment I'd undergone a few minutes ago. The stonewashed jeans were gone, so I ran home as fast as I could and tried to clear my mind of all that I had been through, but I was not capable of doing so. I was only eight years old, but I knew that the fear that man crashed into me, the animosity he caused to grow within me, would remain forever in my mind. Thirty years later, the emotions have never left me. The catalyst was the power that man in the department store had over me. The power, I felt, to do whatever he wanted, to change my life and my future, even though he acted as though it made no difference to him. I believe that if he had chosen to harm me, he would have faced no penalties for his actions. All people in blue suits with plastic or metal badges share this type of impunity.

Whenever I come across these type of people who claim to protect the innocent, it gives me chills.

# LOOKING THROUGH THE KEYHOLE

## DANIS FLORES

A MILLION EYES  
A THOUSAND LIES  
JUSTIFYING DISCRIMINATION THROUGH SIGHTLESS EYES  
THE COMPASS OF TRUTH IS ON YOUR SIDE  
NEVER QUESTIONING THE SYSTEM THAT NURTURES US LIES  
OH, WHY DO I FEEL LIKE I'M DYING INSIDE?  
JUDGMENTAL STARES DEPRIVING ME LIFE,  
MUTATED SUBJECTIVE VIEWS ERODE MY MIND  
I KNOW I WAS WRONG, BUT DO I HAVE TO DIE TWICE?  
O, DEAR SOCIETY, REFORM YOUR PREJUDICED SIGHT  
POLITICALLY DEMOBILIZED  
SOCIAL DEATH, I'M TRYING TO SHOW YOU I'M FIGHTING FOR LIFE  
UNVEIL THE TRUTH THAT LIES BEHIND  
RED AND WHITE STRIPES.  
OUR FLAG SOARS HIGH  
THE LAND OF THE FREE, INCARCERATED WE FIND  
CONFINED  
HUMILIATED NARCOTIZED MINDS  
REPPRESSED BY THE IRON WILL OF THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX: OUR DEMISE  
O, PROGRESSIVE NATION, ASK YOURSELVES WHY  
AMERICA THE GREAT IS THE LEADING RUNNER IN MASS INCARCERATION,  
BUT YOU SAY THAT I LIE?  
WELCOME TO THE LAND OF SOCIAL GENOCIDE  
WHERE WE ARE PLAYED AGAINST ONE ANOTHER  
WHILE THOSE IN PRIVILEGED CONDITIONS  
LAUGH AT OUR PLIGHT  
WE'VE FALLEN INTO THEIR DESIGNS...  
A MILLION EYES A THOUSAND LIES  
JUSTIFYING DISCRIMINATION THROUGH SIGHTLESS EYES  
THE COMPASS OF TRUTH IS ON *THEIR* SIDE  
NEVER QUESTIONING THE SYSTEM THAT NURTURES *YOU* LIES  
AWAKE, FRESH EYES!!



D. Flores 6/17

# LOVE VS. MONEY

## A CONVERSATION OVERHEARD BY DERICK MCCARTHY

I can't remember a lot from my childhood, but one memory sticks out the most. It was a regular day, and I was playing in the park with my brother and sister. There was a section of the park that was closed off for construction. Before we arrived at the park, my mother had warned me about wandering off into that area. "It's dangerous," she said. "Something might fall on you, and you'll get hurt." Of course to me that was more of an invitation than a warning.

As my mother talked with the other mothers, I had my little brother throw the ball in the direction of the construction area. Being sneaky while pretending to be helpful, I went to retrieve it. Once I was in that area, I hopped the fence and looked around. The area was almost done, and there wasn't any real sign of construction happening. I thought to myself, *This place isn't dangerous at all*. I noticed two people by a picnic table talking. It kind of looked like they were arguing. I decided to be nosy and get a little closer. There was a tall man in an impeccable suit and a gorgeous woman. They both looked like they were going out to a fancy restaurant, and I wondered what they were doing in the park. I listened to them speak, and to this day, I'll never forget what they said.

💰: They no longer want you, Love. They want me.

♥: Foolish Money, I am all they really need.

💰: [MONEY laughs.] I am all the people want. Everything they do is to get to me. And when they get a little of me, oh boy, how they want more. I'm the answer to all the world's problems.

♥: You're the cause of them too. I am the one true answer to most of the world's problems. I can genuinely make mankind happy.

💰: They can buy happiness. [MONEY smirks.] They can buy clothes, cars, sex—anything they want.

♥: Except me. [LOVE points to herself with her thumb.]

💰: [MONEY waves LOVE off.] Who needs you? You're overrated.

♥: You sound like a fool. Just like those that worship you.

💰: I am a god. [MONEY raises his hands over his head.]

♥: You're a fraud. [LOVE points to MONEY.]

💰: Tell that to the world.

♥: I don't have to. Those who have you will soon find that out, and then they'll be giving you away to find me. You see, with me, they don't need you; but with you, they realize how much they need me. I make them feel good.

💰: I make them feel great. Anyone can be anything their hearts desire. I can give them power. I can give them influence. I can give them status. I can just make life better. [MONEY smiles, showing his gold teeth.]

♥: Yeah, but what is life without Love? I cannot be bought. You mean nothing to me, Money. I only come to those that aren't expecting me.

\$: And hurt those that believe in you. You trap those that try to run from you. How are you better than me?

♥: I'm kinder.

\$: Tell that to the wife of the husband that beats her because of you.

♥: That's not me. [LOVE puts her hand on her chest; looks dumbfounded.]

\$: But you're the reason she stays with him.

♥: Some misuse my name and others pass me the blame but my intentions are never to hurt. That's your job.

\$: Me? [MONEY has a confused look.]

♥: Yes, you. Mankind hurts each other intentionally just to get to you, and all you do is sit back and laugh. You sit back and watch while families, nations, and civilizations are destroyed, all in your name.

\$: That's not true. I make the world go round.

♥: Yeah, well I keep it from falling apart. Answer me this: If you're so good and kind, why do you come so easily to some and not at all to others? So many have died trying to get to you.

\$: And so many have died trying to find you. You're no better than me, Love. Many have searched and waited their whole lives for you, but you never show up.

♥: I come to all. I am always there, but some just can't recognize me.

\$: You see, that's what I'm saying about you, Love. You're always playing with people's emotions. Me, I'm all business and never hard to find. I'm everywhere, and you can always reach me. If you really want to.

♥: Yeah, you come as easy as you go.

\$: Yeah, maybe to some, but when you got me, oh how you got me. I'll make you popular, pretty, and smart. Hell, I can even make you a singer too. [MONEY laughs hysterically.]

♥: Don't forget to mention how you make the pretty turn ugly when you bring envy, jealousy, and hate.

\$: So do you. People hate when others have you and they don't.

♥: No, I make people happy when other people find me or just plain when I'm around. I bring joy to their hearts.

\$: People are happy when other people find me too. If they can have a piece. [MONEY smirks.] Matter of fact, most people encourage other people to find me.

♥: Yeah, but parents encourage their children to strive for me because I'm real. You're not.

\$: You're real? They can't even see you.

♥: They can feel me.

\$: They can feel me too. When I'm gone. Look, Love, we're not that different.

♥: Oh yes we are, Money.

\$: Grandparents give both of us to their grandkids.

♥: You have a point. [LOVE rubs her chin.]

\$: We both make them do foolish things. Look how they tattoo both of us on their bodies. They wish for us, Love. They dream to get us both. The only thing is that I hear them curse your name all the time. How many do you hear curse me and wish they didn't have me? They run to me while they run from you.

♥: Only those that don't understand.

\$: Who does?

♥: I bring peace; I alleviate hate. I'm the reason people help each other. I am the only good in humanity. Without me, it would be destroyed.

\$: I help those in need too. Matter of fact, I often allow those that doubt you to see your existence. Better futures are provided to children because of me. I can help change the world—

♥: To a worse place.

\$: No, to a better place for many.

[Love laughs hysterically.]

\$: Oh, you find that funny? Well peep this. As long as you're here, I will always be here, Love.

♥: Why is that? [Love looks at him with confusion.]

\$: Because. People LOVE MONEY.

At that moment, I wasn't sure if they just noticed me or had been aware of my presence, but they both looked in my direction, and I took off running. I ran and tried to hop the gate quickly and fell. When I woke up, my mother was standing over me and said, "I told you not to go over there, boy, it is dangerous." To this day, I don't know if what I heard was a dream or real, but I have never looked at love and money the same.

## EULOGY

### GREGORY TERRELL HEADLEY

Here lies a person once having great potential, countless achievements lost due to the uninstrumental use of the mental.

This inanimate vessel, a consciousnessless vegetable, overshadowed by darkness and cheap thrills, now laid to waste, taking its place amongst the hollowed hills. A moment of silence for the silenced, if you will...

After all that we have never been through, I feel the need to give you my words in this speech. And may these words resonate in the minds of all that they meet, hopefully before you are six feet deep...six feet beneath many feet.

I yelled out loudly, hoping not to be heard as a weak whisper or that faint voice in the distance looking for a listener. I begged and I pleaded, I pleaded and I begged! You tried to murder me, yet here you lie dead.

All I wish for now is one more chance to convince you to stop this nonsense. Instead, here I am, your number one fan, at this Gravediggaz concert.

So, my last words to you, a person I barely know, Rest in Peace...

From:  
Your conscience

To:  
You, the unconscious fool.

# DESTINED FATE

## A QUESTIONNAIRE

### KENNETH HARDEN-SMITH AKA S.U.P.R.STAR YU

#### WHERE AM I DESTINED TO GO?

Momentarily the mind is set for the unknown.

#### IS "YU" HE?

I is me and I can't depict a limited he as I see a destiny within me.

#### WHAT IS MY NAME?

It definitely isn't the same that is proclaimed now that the body coordinates pertaining its subconscious conscience in pure vain.

#### IS FATE REAL OR IS IT EVENTUAL AND INEVITABLE HATE?

I couldn't say can't relate or correlate this phase.

#### WHY AM I HERE?

For a purpose the soul surface in this earth before I began my lurching.

#### TOMORROW OR TODAY?

Tomorrow is better than the present as I represent the live and arisen.

#### IS MY LEGACY IN INTERFERENCE WITH MY FATE?

That is not possible as the nonstopping probable is a shy friend from the doomed enemy as I seek a retreat towards the heavenly.

#### COULD DESTINY BE ON THE WAY TO TAKE ME FROM SUCH A ROTTEN PLACE?

It can be if I let the spirit leap and the feet begin to sweep for a place that is known to be of peace as my soul flatters from its armor then displaying the iconic piece.

#### SHOULD I RACE MY SOUL TO MY FATE AS TO ESCAPE THE DEVIOS MAZE?

I know my fate is me destined to give life a chase.

# WASHINGTON SQUARE TO WALK KILL

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*Do people who don't regret their crimes deserve to reenter society after their sentence?*

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**GREGORY:** That is a very interesting question, so I will answer it like this: It is not whether a person regrets his crime that qualifies or disqualifies him from freedom. It is whether he understands the universal laws of karma, pure potentiality, the law of giving, and the law of attraction that determine this. Every action and decision has made me who I am. I do not regret it. I just try to understand it.

**DENNIS:** It depends on if the crime was premeditated or not. If I assault someone for harming a loved one, then yes. But if I assault someone for my benefit or out of pure malice, then no.

**KEITH:** That's a hard question, simply for this example: If someone was strong-arm robbing your grandmother, and you saw them in the act, and an attempt to stop them led to an assault charge, would you regret it? Would you do it again to stop him from robbing your child?

**TOREY:** Regret to me doesn't always have to play a part because if your back is against the wall, you never know what you will do to get it off the wall. But I do believe you should want to change. I have met people in prison who have said that they are going right back out there to do the very thing that landed them here in the first place. I have also met people that want to change and live right.

**SHAQUAN:** Yes, because you don't have to regret something in order to learn from it. Most people in here don't regret their crimes because every experience molds you to be a better person once you start to learn from your mistake, but without the mistake, there would be no lesson.

**DERICK:** Some people feel that their crimes were committed for just reasons, reasons that we may not be able to identify with. However, regret is not a necessary component for rehabilitation. A person can become a completely changed individual and not have regrets but still have learned a lesson.  
#NoRegretsOnlyLessons

## WALK KILL TO WASHINGTON SQUARE

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*How would you react if you found out that the classmate that sits next to you every day did a 15-year sentence for attempted murder?*

*How would you react if you found out that the classmate that sits next to you every day did a 15-year sentence for attempted murder?*

**GEORGINA:** If I heard that, I would be surprised. I have never met someone who has gone to prison for attempted murder, and I would not expect to meet him or her at NYU. That said, people certainly change. I don't believe that past actions make someone good or bad. If indeed my classmate did try to kill someone, I would feel uneasy, but how does he or she behave in class? Does he show aggression toward me or my classmates? Does he respect the professor? Fifteen years is a long time, and it's possible this person regrets the decision or wouldn't make it again. I would do my best to be open to this person's opinions and how he or she presents when sitting next to me. I can't say I would completely disregard this information, but I would try to look beyond it.

**BRIAN:** Worst-case scenario is a professor casually announces it at the start of the semester with no contextualization, leading me to assume the worst about the person immediately. I'd try to get past my biases, but it could be very hard to overcome despite my best intentions. I'd be curious to get to know them, but that fear and anxiety introduced at the beginning would definitely impede that.

Now on the other hand, if this is an individual I've had the opportunity to build a relationship with beforehand, that's a best-case scenario. Because I already possess that empathetic link, the fear and anxiety that might exist are incredibly diminished. I'd like to learn that person's story, find out who they are, and why they think their life got to that point. The best opportunities for learning come from interacting with those with life experiences widely different from one's own, and such a classmate offers a unique opportunity to better my understanding of the world and its inhabitants.

## (EX) MICROSOFT / (CON) APPLE

DAVID "WAVY" GARRENO

*The following dialogue takes place at a job interview, entailing an entry-level software development vacancy at Apple Headquarters, between the employer, APPLE CEO, and a prospective employee, WAVY.*

**APPLE CEO:** Greetings :)

**WAVY:** Salutations to you also! ;)

**APPLE CEO:** Wow!!! I like your energy, however I do need to adjust my hearing aid and lower it, to accommodate the high frequency of your voice.

**WAVY:** Sorry, I'm just so excited for this opportunity.

**APPLE CEO:** On the contrary, I appreciate your enthusiasm. I was reading your application, and while you do meet the educational prerequisites, I was briefed on your federal background check, that you are currently on parole.

**WAVY:** Well, I'm on post-release supervision, and while I'm not proud

of my time in, prison allowed me the time to find Christianity, gain licensing from the American Board of Optometry, and pursue my education by attending NYU's PEP courses.

**APPLE CEO:** "Parole," "post-release..." Let's not blur lines here. And while I don't value your history as an ex-counterfeiter, we here at Apple "believe everyone deserves a second chance," even Ponzi scammers such as yourself.

**WAVY:** I've changed my ways; I found the light of Jesus and got As in NYU.

**APPLE CEO:** Christian, huh, you are a long ways from the Vatican, Mr. Wavy.

**WAVY:** That's Catholicism, not Christ—

**APPLE CEO:** Soda, pop, cola, it's all the same. Nevertheless, NYU!! My alma mater, what a coincidence. Now I read that you have previous experience in software development. Would you care to elaborate?

**WAVY:** Why, yes. I gained prior concepts of Java and Betascript while working at IBM, Dell, and Gateway, and I even freelanced for Microsoft's Windows Security Network.

**APPLE CEO:** Dell, Gateway, Microsoft Windows—those are our ex-rivals, and I hold in my heart contempt for those rival corporations, as I do for my ex-wife who cheated on me with Bill Gates's nephew. Alas! Being that Apple is an Equal Opportunity Employer, even for jailbird, gangbanging, and Bible-hugging traitors such as yourself...

**WAVY:** It was just freelance though.

**APPLE CEO:** Gateway/Microsoft employee is synonymous with gang-affiliation; you should read the company's manifesto when you get a chance, but let's move on. While you quite match our criteria for our vacancy in the software department, given your vested status at Microsoft Windows, we do have openings in area of software design for "freelancers" such as yourself.

**WAVY:** Sounds great! What does the position entail? Am I going to be part of developing the new iCloud interface?

**APPLE CEO:** Well, to be specific, the food service cafeteria at our headquarters needs help designing a cutting-edge vegan, kosher, gluten-free menu and your knowledge of frivolous, outdated software interfaces would be a valuable asset to our menu development team.

**WAVY:** Vegan? Kosher...

**APPLE CEO:** Why yes, this should befit you, after all, Jews eat kosher and Jesus was a Jew.

**WAVY:** How fitting to my qualifications, a "mess hall" job.

**APPLE CEO:** "Mess hall" sounds so *institutional*, you will be an important piece of the puzzle, servicing our "real" employees' nutritional needs as a "menu designer."

**WAVY:** [Looks at wedding band and persists, despite the insult to his integrity.] Okay then, I guess beggars can't be choosers, and I need to provide for my wife and baby boy, James.

**APPLE CEO:** Great!!! You start Monday. Can't wait, huh!!!

**WAVY:** I guess any job will do to get post-release supervision off my back.

**APPLE CEO:** Like you said, beggars can't be choosy. Just ask the guy holding the paper cup outside; he's on parole too.

**WAVY:** Post-release—

**APPLE CEO:** [Interrupting] See you Monday!!! Send my regards to the Pope.

**WAVY:** I'm not Roman-Cath—

**APPLE CEO:** [Interrupting] See you Monday!!!

*WAVY exits the office of a lucrative APPLE CEO, a better man than he indeed, accolades spilled over the walls like a Pollock, an embroidery of success, displayed mantle upon mantle across exclusive designer shelves appropriately located at the posterior of the office. The accomplishments this man has on a six-foot by eight-foot section of wall help to signify to prospective employees that no number of lifetimes could yield the number of titles this man held, displayed for us, hopeless ants serving the colony, to see: that we may realize that this company's power grasps the nation for generations beyond our reach. Just as these feelings of insurmountable proportion have any time to be retained by Wavy's mind, simple in comparison to the CEO, he exits the elevator, and before exiting the lobby of Apple headquarters, the phone rings...*

**WAVY:** Hello.

**WIFE:** Hi, how was the interview, Honey?

**WAVY:** Beloved, let's just say there is more animosity between ex-Microsoft employees and Apple employees than there is between Bloods and Crips in the New York State prison system. I actually feel safer in prison than working at Apple as a Microsoft Windows, Gateway "gangbanger." Got a job though. I start Monday.

**WIFE (BELOVED):** Huh? Well, Jesus is good and God blessed our son.

**WAVY (BELOVED):** Yes, I think even Jesus can't help me with this predicament.

**WIFE (BELOVED):** See ya later. Bye, Honey.

**WAVY:** Love you, bye. [WAVY hangs up phone.]

[WIFE hangs up phone.]

# I HAVE PREVAILED...!

## DAYSHAWN GILLIAM AKA J VIVID

Beyond the threshold of ignorance,  
and negative diligence that has  
caused many errors to terror my mind's innocence...I have prevailed!  
Through the rough terrain trails of distractions,  
bad choices and wrong interactions.  
Weighing over my shoulders like barbells...I have prevailed!  
Among the naysayers, slow strollers, and hope hoppers.  
Distraught, physically distorted, and lost copers...  
Miseries,  
and sympathies harmonizing pain through symphonies, those prison  
coasters...I have prevailed!  
Finding balance along the scales.  
Understanding odds, my cause to reasons I excel.  
Where I should be, mentally, elevated and propelled.  
Shedding the old me, look closely, see...I have prevailed!  
In a society where, honestly, I seemed set to fail.  
But I'm currently incoherent to those wishing me hell.  
And so I strive,  
though with butterflies...chin high, I prosper.

Next step, my best yet, yes!  
No one can stop the  
eloquence of this moment—I own it—no one can block me  
from this, once more I run for...  
Opportunity got me  
striving the horizon,  
visualizing my mind climbing,  
chasing this education,  
utilizing my time finding  
obstacles to deface em.  
Unbinding these binds that have  
kept me undeniable dispelled...  
But here I say, I am proud today,  
For I have prevailed...

# WALKKILL TO WASHINGTON SQUARE

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*What effect does today's workforce play on undergrads?*

**NYELAH:** I think a lot of people are just trying to find a way to exist as they are, but they have to be able to afford to do so, so the workforce is a constant presence, even if it's just in the back of people's minds. Everybody wants to graduate with job prospects, especially because most of us will be graduating with some debt. NYU is strange because everybody is trying to jumpstart their careers while in school, so the workforce also aligns with a certain timeline that you should adopt for success or productivity. A lot of my friends are trying to graduate early.

**KYLE:** One of the things I struggle with is the expectation for every hour of our day to be a hustle. Sometimes I want to come home after work or school and do nothing. It often feels like we don't get the right to do that as an undergrad entering the workforce, certainly not in New York City; those hours "need" to be spent doing homework, free-lancing, working on an extracurricular project, putting in hours at an unpaid internship, etc. The whole point is that there's a mad rush to "build your resume" and "use this time wisely."

Working under these expectations, I think we deny ourselves the pleasure of living apart from the work we do, and, at the same time, we deny ourselves the simple pleasure of being bored. Having a moment to decompress, without anything at all to do or to think about, is essential to keep yourself from going crazy.

**JUN:** The increasing demands on today's workforce—changing job requirements, systemic obstacles to education and vocational opportunities, an aging population, the stigma of "pursuing passions" over conforming to professional occupations, the threat of automation replacing jobs—is a constant and terrifying pressure. But contrary to these pressures being swords of Damocles, I think they could be driving forces for positive change and evolution, where every new cohort of undergraduates must continually innovate and initiate change to stay relevant—and I think that's how progress is achieved. I'm lucky to be at Gallatin, where I can see this happening in person!

# REBIRTH

KENNETH HARDEN-SMITH AKA S.U.P.R.STAR YU

Before the cutting of the umbilical.

The pool I thus swiveled through, which imperial was the sequence of the visual.

As my rebirth on this earth, the wings had spread as an eagle.

The feet grew and outgrew their pedestal higher than a set of rules.

Meanwhile intrusion is grooving in a mentality rather than actuality.

The planting of a seed brought new and unique means.

Where dreams careen with life and death. You take such steps of the inevitable,  
toward the magnificent and incredible.

Negating the mind capturing, decrepit, ill-intellectual, and destitute.

Don't doubt the immeasurable of a new beginning.

The skin is thickening instead of shriveling.

The rebirth of self made it possible to endure the pain and hurt.

As numero uno, the feet pulled through.

Above all else, self acknowledges to what led the knee to have knelt.

The eyes decipher the harsh realities of a battle in deceit.

You see peace brings the rebirth in which soul surfs.

Thus touching and searching for the creator that created an intelligent specific type.

Rebirth concerning self. Let the light distinguish the value within self.

And not the material that was issued after the umbilical.

# REFLECTIVE SELF-QUESTIONNAIRE

KEITH GOLDEN

## WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

You mean besides these bars, beyond the gate. Hoping the count hurries up and clears.

## HOW DID YOU LAND HERE?

Don't ask me, I'll tell you it was pre-determined destiny. Laid in store by our forefathers.

## WHEN YOU GET OUT, DO YOU HAVE ANY GOALS?

Sit in a classroom, learn something. New friends, and a lucrative job.

## WHAT SUPPORT SYSTEM DO YOU HAVE IN PLACE? YOU KNOW IT'S NOT EASY, RIGHT?

I got family that cares about me; I'll be alright.

## IS THE BLOCK STILL HOT?

I'm sure it's hot as ready fish grease.

## YOU STILL PLAN ON MAKING IT DO WHAT IT DO? OR ARE YOU DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Both, honestly.

## SMOOTH OR SMOOVE?

Smoother than smooove.

## MAKE THE RULES OR BREAK THE RULES?

Change the rules, and make new ones as well.

## CRIMINAL OR CONVICT?

Reformed.

## ARE YOU ABLE TO SAY WHAT YOU WANT, GO AS YOU PLEASE?

Only when you're fresh out the womb, and when the soul exits the corpse, are you free. Free from responsibility.

## DO YOU STILL NOT GIVE A SHIT? OR ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT MAD SHIT?

Worried can't even describe. I think about mad shit though, here on the inside.

## WOULD YOU STILL TAKE IT FOR GRANTED?

Granted I'm here, and I can't take it back, let's focus on moving forward. I see the blessings in that!

# THE SHADOW OF OUR PAST

VINCENT THOMPSON

**“H**e got a gun! He got a gun! Grab the children!” The frightened woman directs her eldest son to the manly responsibility of grabbing his younger siblings and pushing them into the corner store, out of the line of fire. Bloud! Bloud, Bloud, Bloud! The 40-caliber handgun sounds off in my direction. I thought I left this life in my past. I stumble over an empty 40-ounce beer bottle, fall and hit my head on concrete. “Yo, he hit the deck!” an individual screams from the car to inform the gunman. As I lie on the ground, I start to grab my body; I am amazed that none of the bullets hit me. The reckless gunman who is in all black approaches me. He gets closer and closer, the closer he gets, the more he starts to resemble my...my...my brother? What is the message? This is not making any sense. He stands over me and raises the gun to my face at point blank range. Then he...squeezes...the...trigger. Blocka! There is no pain; all I see is a white flash.

Without warning, fright grabs me again. “Cover all angles of the house; we got a runner,” a detective orders his fellow officers. The mixture of the car traffic, loud talking, the red and blue lights that are reflected in my living room awake me. I run to the window to see what’s going on. A dozen federal agents are surrounding my apartment building. This whole scenario is shocking—confusing—as I back up slowly from the window, I bump into the coffee table, and a large amount of crack cocaine falls onto the floor with an open pack of Ziploc bags. The drugs are in the process of being prepared for distribution. How did I get here? Somebody set me up! A heavy dose of panic sets in as I hear the intense movement of combat boots and the military equipment in the building staircase. It sounds like a stampede of animals. My eyes travel from the drugs to the door; I must do something, quick. Sweat trickles down my face from the uncertainty, but for the life of me, I... cannot...move.

Boom, boom, boom! The wooden door slams into the wall and snaps me back into reality. “Give me your I.D.,” the officer states. “You are violating rule 112.20.” My deep sleep is interfering with the daily morning count. I rise up out of the bed, grab my I.D. and place it in the officer’s hand. After I give him the I.D. card, I lie back down. The disciplinary infractions I face are the least of my worries. Loss of food packages, commissaries, or restricted phone privileges cannot measure up to the life-threatening predicaments of one of those nightmares.

As I lie here, refusing to close my eyes, I turn on the radio. As expected, *Breakfast-to-Go* with D.J. Vee spills out of my speakers and his high energy and unfiltered truths give me the morning boost that I am craving. D.J. Vee states: “We live in a country where there is a felony box on every application from housing to employment to college loans. It does not matter if you change; in this country, the one second it takes to commit that criminal act will haunt you for the rest of your life. You telling me to reform, you telling me to change; what for? Are you going to look at me differently? Even when we do change, we’re constantly faced with our past...” “Turn that off!” I hear from down the hall. “Ssh, even listening to the radio is an offense. It’s like the idea is to squeeze all the innocence out of us by making even non-criminal behaviors infractions.”

I get back into bed and glance at the wall where I have hung my associate’s degree, food handling, P.A.C.E. basic and advanced certificates, and three pieces of my work that have been published in *The Gallatin Review*. These are just some of the accomplishments that I achieved while incarcerated. No matter what I do or how much I better myself, the past still shows its evil face today. The mental traumas from the gun violence and drug dealing of my past still haunt me at night. Then there is the criminal stigma I have to carry with me every day into the challenging future of post-incarceration, which many scholars refer to as “civil death.” Where a felony on a person’s record can deny them the access to vote, employment, the chance to get back into school, housing, and even public assistance. This system of ruthless rejection coupled with demanding, desperate circumstances compels plenty of people to resort back to the life of crime. However, I am going to use my past as motivation. The obstacles I have to deal with today and in my future are not going to stop me from achieving my goals; they are going to make it more special when I do achieve what I set out to accomplish.

On that cue, I rise up out of my bed and grab my toothbrush and washcloth. Then I provide myself with some inspirational words: “I survived situations in my past when my life and freedom were on the line. Therefore, I am not going to be discouraged by what these people think about me or the little barriers I have to hurdle over in my future. Employment: I am going to create my own platform by starting my own business. Student loans: I am going to study and work hard so I can get that scholarship. Housing: I am not only going to buy myself a home, but I am going to get my mother one too. Stop me! Ha!” Out of reflex I sound off my confident signature laugh. Seriously—how are they going to stop the unstoppable?

## **A COMPANION**

### **MILES LEWIS**

**M**ay 25, 2010. For the past three hours, I have been pacing. My feet burn. I lie down and let my subconscious take over, and beautiful thoughts enter my head. I'm dreaming of being in the car with my girlfriend driving, I do not know where. I hear birds chirping in my ears and keys from a distance. I open my eyes and realize it's the officer doing his rounds to make sure everyone is alive. Early morning, everything is so quiet, I can hear a pin drop. The only noise is birds, talking in their own language, to each other. I am just lying there, until I come in view with nature. There is a spider staring at me from the corner of the window. I watch from the head of the bed. This little creature that is no bigger than a pebble notices me watching his or her every move, so, the spider puts on a personal show for me.

My newfound friend crawls slowly but steadily to top of the iron bars, and suddenly it swings out, descending on a thin silken thread spun from one end of its body. With a leap and swing, it secures the end of the thread to another bar. The little grayish spider then crawls back along the silken thread to where it started and swings out in another direction, casting a second, similar thread. I watch the tiny creature at work with increasing fascination. My new friend is giving me a great show. The spider seems to know exactly what to do and where to take the next thread. There is no hesitation, no mistake, and no haste. The spider is a great performer; it knows its job and does its best to carry it out with confidence. When the frame is finally in place, the spider proceeds to weave a web that is intricately beautiful and absolutely perfect, with all the strands evenly spaced.

When the web is completely finished, the spider goes to its center and stares at me to get approval of the fine work. I just witnessed an architectural feat by an extremely skilled artist. I give the performance a 10-plus score in my book. My mind is full of questions after the show. Who taught the spider to make a perfect web? Could it really have acquired the skill through evolution, or did God create the spider and endow it with the ability to make a web so that it could catch food and perpetuate its species? How big is the brain of such a tiny creature? Did it act simply by instinct, or had it somehow learned to store the knowledge of web making? Perhaps one day I would ask an entomologist. For the moment, I know I've just witnessed something extraordinarily beautiful and uplifting.

My chamber faces northeast. With the sun coming up in the morning, the rays of the rising sun turn the newly made web into glittering disc of rainbow colors before it shifts further west and sinks below the horizon. I can hear keys and the officer banging on the door. I do not want to move in case I should frighten the spider away. I get up slowly to show the officer I am alive. That morning, I name my spider friend Huey.

I'm guessing it is a male from the size of his body. Usually female spiders have bigger bodies. I can see in my peripheral vision that my friend is watching my every move. The officer comes back with breakfast, making tons of noises and disturbing my little friend. I want to feed my little friend. Soon I discover he is not merely sitting there waiting for his prey but is forever vigilant. Whenever a corner of the web is ruffled or turned by the breeze, the spider is there in an instant to repair the damage. As days pass, the spider renews the web from time to time. Occasionally, my little friend gives me a different performance, redesigning the web.

I become very attached to the little creature after watching his activities and gaining an understanding of his habits. First thing in the morning, throughout the day, and last thing at night, I look at Huey and feel reassured when I see that he is still there. The tiny spider becomes my companion. My spirits lighten, the depressing feelings of complete isolation are broken by having another living being near me, even though it is so tiny and incapable of response.

Over time, the friendship becomes a comradely feeling. I watch my pal catch little bugs and wrap them up in the web, mummy-like. I never witness my friend eat at all. I think he's a little shy eating in front of me. One day I might see three or five bugs on Huey's web, and the next morning, there will be only two or one.

September. The wind picks up with each rainy day. The temperature falls further down. I close the window at times to prevent Huey from being blown away. I watch Huey anxiously move his web. Therefore, for a few days, I sacrifice the window being closed and the cell being stuffy and a little moist in the air.

The next morning, I wake up to the realization that my only living being left me suffering the pain of betrayal. It feels like my brother left me in the middle of an ocean, all alone. "I'm not hungry," I scream when the officer comes with chow. I just want to sleep off the depression and stay strong for these next two and half months alone again. I have a dream. Huey and me are in a big animated scene, hanging out and laughing about our days in the 10-by-12 cell. I can hear loud screaming in my sleep coming from afar, and the sound is getting louder and louder. I can hardly get up from this beautiful dream. The officer asks, "Are you all right?" "Yes, just deep sleeping," I say in a raspy voice. "You want lunch or not?" the officer asks. "No, not hungry," I say, turning back over.

One day later, I wake up. I find my friend Huey sitting in the center of a newly made web in a corner of the ceiling. I am so cheerful that my only friend at this moment of time did not desert me in the concrete-block room. From this experience, I come to grip that other beings are more loyal than human beings.

# DEBRIEFING FOR DECRIMINALIZATION

R. SIRUS GORDON

Debriefing: “to interrogate in order to obtain intelligence gathered.” This also concerns released felons upon reentering society. The term and exercise is usually performed for military soldiers after a mission and/or a traumatic experience like war. This can assist in psychological welfare and reestablishing a productive mind in normal society.

Not too many felons can easily adjust to normal societal standards after being away for five years or more. As opposed to parole policing, debriefing a felon upon release makes sure he or she is more likely to maintain his or her overall liberty. What about the horrors we’re unaware of? Recidivism rates can lower a substantial amount following a debriefing.

It may sound preposterous at first, but if you really think about the impact debriefing has had for ex-marines and soldiers of all branches, it can be equally effective for felons. Not to compare an honorable position in society to a person who’s paid his debt to society. The main objective of debriefing is to gather the most pertinent information and assist people with their psychological needs. Many who make it back out into society can’t automatically adjust; for example, they may feel mental anguish from being confined in a Special Housing Unit, also known as the Box. Debriefing can particularly decrease the recidivism rate in America and hopefully all over the world.

# WASHINGTON SQUARE TO WALK KILL

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*What are you nervous about?*

*What goals do you have? What do you hope to accomplish with your associate’s degrees—workforce entry? Further education?*

*What are you nervous about?*

**OMAR:** I'm nervous about all of us stepping back into society and being successful as we all plan on being. I'm nervous about being accepted by mainstream society and actually getting a legitimate second chance at being a productive citizen for our country. I'm nervous about being judged before someone gets to know me. I'm nervous about love, fear, and being able to keep pushing through pain and roadblocks that I'm bound to experience without feeling it's too hard and settling for my old lifestyle. I'm nervous, but I will not let it get the best of me. I will succeed.

**DERICK:** Coming home and being a failure. I've been locked up since I was 20, and I am coming home at 34. I feel like all my time in here was wasted potential. I could have been great, and even though I can still be, will I? Will I finally reach my potential and represent my family in a positive light, or will all the things I've done in here result in nothing?

**TOREY:** I'm nervous about failure. I'm also nervous about the challenges I may face looking for employment and applying for school upon my release.

**MILES:** The terror of getting rearrested once the metal gates open up. Having a felony, you are public enemy number one candidate to get rearrested. Just walking down the street to go to the store and purchase food—once walking back to your residence, the police can just stop you and rearrest for walking while you have a felony on your sleeve. You can be that statistic for the officer's arrest count. This is what has me the most nervous.

*What goals do you have? What do you hope to accomplish with your associate's degrees—workforce entry? Further education?*

**VINCENT:** I plan to use my communications and writing skills I learned while accomplishing my associate's degree toward being a public speaker and author of my own literature. The development of these skills helps me articulate myself verbally and through different forms of writing, so I could share my experiences with others.

One of my top priorities is to further my education by achieving my bachelor's degree. I set a long-term goal for myself to earn my master's within five years after I am released from prison. I use my public school system as motivation. Hempstead High School has the highest dropout rate in Long Island, which is correlated to the school-to-prison pipeline I fell victim to. To survive that turmoil and have the resilience to bounce back educationally and put the title of "Doctor" in front of my name would not only motivate me but also motivate others.

**TOREY:** I would like to one day start my own business. And after my associate's degree, I would like to get my bachelor's degree.

**MILES:** My objectives are: achieve enough information to apply for my personal business or grind for a position in a corporation. Be an improved father, husband, and friend to my small circle of friends. I want to show my family that you can change from any life situation. I just want to be similar to other individuals in this world. To be successful and to keep happiness in my back pocket. My education goal is to continue my schooling once I finish giving the public their debt back, and gain my bachelor's degree.

**GREGORY:** I am going to further my education! I am aiming for postdoctoral studies. In short, "I have tasted the tree of knowledge," and I will never look back.

# BE THERE IN A FEW

ORI JOHNSON

By the sweat of your brow, you'll be paid for your work.  
Through the ups and downs, never throw in the towel—  
*Fight!*

For success, success

What would life be if I could not progress?

Imagine it's like having both legs  
but you still can't make it up them steps.

Yea...I failed many times,

Times I don't regret,

But for me to fail and give up

It's the same as tying a rope around my neck.

*Success, success*

In the future, who knows where I'll be.

As of right now, I'ma treat the world like a football field  
and make a play

I refuse to let society tackle me.

*Success, success*

Not yet for me,

The America I live in is not the America I see on TV,

There, the money looks like it grows on trees,

while mines grow from the habit of drug fiends,

There, there is a backyard full of beautiful flowers and well-trimmed grass.

While mines the concrete's cracked,

where empty beer bottles lie instead of being thrown in the trash.

So one sunny day...

My bro ask me where I'm going and

I say, "to this place called success."

I see the bright sign over there

but the road's blocked—you know what I did next?

I removed the barricades

To stay on this dark path, I just won't accept!

Then I asked him, "Are you coming or are you staying?"

*If not, you gettin' left in the past like my ex.*

By the sweat of your brow, you'll be paid for your work

Through the ups and the downs, never throw in the towel,

*Fight.*

For success, success!

# CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

**DENNIS “HOLLYWOOD” BAILER**, was born in Hollywood, California. Thirty years old, he has since moved to Queens, New York, is striving to be an entrepreneur, and is currently serving a two-year sentence. He writes, “Education is the key to success. Better to start now than later.”

**DAVID “WAVY” CARRENO** writes, “My life is hard, like holding your piss while taking a shit. I write to commemorate all my peoples staying true to their Greens. I write for: where ‘TOP’ cigarettes stench, Whites holding down their courts, Blacks claiming their benches, and Latins got their own weight section.”

**SIMEON DE’LESLINE** is a Haitian-American writer. He is 31.

**DAYSHAWN GILLIAM**, also known as J Vivid, is a poet and songwriter who enjoys singing and motivational speaking. He is 26 years old, from the Bronx, and currently striving to be a poet and someone who brings change to society through his voice.

**DANIS FLORES** writes, “I just turned 30 years old (sheesh!) and am on an educational journey to find my place in this world. I am a beginner in the realm of fine arts, I have a great appreciation for graffiti art, and I really like anime. I cannot wait to jump headfirst into the computer world.”

**KEITH GOLDEN** is a young man. At the age of 26, he has recently begun a two-year sentence. He plans to lay a foundation at NYU and to continue his education and to better his life upon his release in the summer of 2018. He quotes, “This is a minor setback for a major comeback.”

**R. SIRUS GORDON**, author of “Debriefing for Decriminalization,” writes, “You’ve just voyaged the start of my road to success. Thank you.”

**KENNETH HARDEN-SMITH** is also known as Yusef and S.U.P.R. Star Yu, which stands for Superb, Universal, Poetic, Rock, and the Star. He loves music, poetry, writing, exercising, and learning new things. He is at work on his first book, which he is excited about. He is 29 years old and is from the Bronx, New York; North Carolina; and Maryland. He writes, “I’m ready for the battle because a gladiator lies within self.”

**GREGORY TERRELL HEADLEY**, also known as Seven Cipher Light, was born in Far Rockaway, Queens. An aspiring writer, poet, and artist, he writes, “Help who you can, and if you cannot help them, refer them to someone who can. Peace.”

**SHAQUAN HINDS**, also known as Princeo Diamond, explains, “I write to extinguish the pains of my soul. Life has taken me through many ups and downs, but through all the madness, my words have elevated my mind from gone to some.”

**TOREY JENKINS** is from Hempstead, Long Island. He writes, “I’m in my second year of a two-and-a-half year bid for a drug charge. This is my first and most definitely my last bid. This is only my first semester at NYU, but so far I’m having a lot of fun and learning new things every day. I am excited and very grateful to be a part of the NYU family. Although I don’t have enough time left here to finish my degree (I’ll be going home next May), I plan on finishing my education upon my release.”

**ORI JOHNSON** is a young songwriter trying to improve his craft. He enjoys listening to and making music. He also loves new experiences and learning.

**MILES LEWIS** writes, “Hotep! I am doing a 12.5 year sentence for assault in the first degree. I have 18 months to regain my freedom back to society. I have learned a tremendous amount about what I want to achieve in order to have a brighter future. I now feel for the first time in my life that I have control over the decisions I make. Today I have a healthier relationship with my family, have broadened my support network through educational goals, and I am excited about the future.” He is currently studying liberal arts and core curriculum at NYU and plans to apply these credits to a bachelor’s degree in business.

**DERICK MCCARTHY** is 33 and from Laurelton, Queens. He has been incarcerated for 13 years and has participated in numerous programs that will continue to assist with his growth and development. He will be released in the spring of 2018.

**VINCENT THOMPSON** is a 28-year-old man who has been incarcerated for 10 years. However, he is looking forward to being released in September and obtaining his associate’s degree in liberal arts this summer. He writes, “Upon my release, I plan to continue with my education and to not be content with my associate’s or even

a bachelor’s degree but to bring my ambition and drive to the academic field and strive further for a master’s or doctorate degree. I am also in the process of developing a collection of creative writing that displays to the world our experience within this criminal justice system.”

**OMAR WALKER** has been with the PEP program from its second semester. He is a certified optician, is in the final stage of becoming a certified Braille transcriber, and is learning sign language. He writes, “I’ve tried to make the best out of this time by achieving everything that I touch.”

**WILLIE WILLIAMS** is in his third semester at NYU PEP, where he studies liberal arts and cultural studies. He writes, “I am adventurous, love learning new information, and I am very open-minded to new and bigger things. I am on my way home in August, and once I am released, I am going to pursue my dream, and that’s in business.”





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